

## D. of Pride 741

Chapter 741 741- New Variable

Couldn't the other party be less obvious that they were going through a power up? Simon thought so in his head but did not utter it loud. The reason for that was because for some reason, the blood inside his body was agitated as he saw Godwin's transformation.

What was going on?

Why did the other party induce a bloodline reaction within him?

Simon observed the other party's transformation, that kind of appearance was too similar to a certain race.

"Could it be that he has the bloodline of an angel?"

In the world of Althaea, there lived many mystical races, out of which humans, demi-humans, beastmen, dragons, sea folks and demon nobles were only some of the few.

There are many unusual races, races that are yet to be discovered and races born from the intermarriage of two species. The race of angels was similarly one of the few mystical species present in the world of Althaea.

From what Simon knew about the race of angels as a Demon Earl, was only a little. Most of his knowledge came from the discussion and the information that was shared from the previous Hexennacht.

He had never encountered an angel before, which is why Simon couldn't be sure if the other party in front of him was an angel or not.

No wait... Simon suddenly recalled the scenes from the [Historia] on the third trial. The woman who fought against the Atrocity, Yelan was an angel and a very high ranking one at that.

Simon glanced at the similarities between the two and felt that it was probable. Although Godwin still looked very much human, that kind of aura wasn't something that any adventurers could give off.

Simon cleared his mind and increased the output of the curse energy spreading through the world. It did not matter whether his opponent was an angel or not, all that mattered right now was him taking the other party down.

Now that both of them had brought out their trump cards, the battle from this point on would decide everything.

Which side will win and which side will lose? Simon and Godwin both stared at each other, the tension in the air was palpable. Just as they were both about to make their move, an unknown variable that nobody had accounted for, appeared.

[Warning- The Fourth Finger has intruded the Sixth Trial, Open Space- Snowlands. It is an anomaly that shouldn't have existed in the trials in the first place. Stop it before it defeats the Abomination and goes through the teleportation gate].

[Additional Warning- Failure on stopping it will plunge the world into a cataclysm, affecting billions of lifeforms]

A notification in a glaring red colour suddenly appeared in front of the two challengers causing them to lock their brows in a frown.

"Fourth Finger?" Godwin showed a rare baffled expression as he continued to read the notification.

This fourth finger was another unexpected variable that he did not account for much like the demon. The notification had also appeared at the worst possible time. What's more, given the information in it, Godwin couldn't just ignore it even if he wanted to.

After all, on failure of stopping this new variable, it will plunge the world into a cataclysm that will affect billions of lives... the Fourth Finger had to be stopped.

Where was the other party hiding all this time? How did they manage to deceive the trial up until now? Godwin wondered.

Flying across him, Simon too was having his own thoughts as he contemplated something in his head while reading the notification.

Neither side attacked the other as if there was a taciturn agreement between them beforehand.

The adventurers in the distance who did not understand the situation could only look at the two in confusion wondering why they had ceased acting against each other all of a sudden. The atmosphere of animosity was still there, but none of them made the first move.

"Are they measuring each other up? Is the demon that strong?"...

"They must be having a mental battle right now. I heard that some of the High Rankers from the mainland fight, they could easily tell the party's movements and actions just based on the slight movements, aura and the posture of their opponent's bodies. Even though we don't see, the two must be locked in an intense battle"...

"I see than should we help the leader? This is the perfect opportunity to bring the demon down"...

"Do not bother, that level of battle is clearly beyond us. We will only get in the way of the leader. Besides the golems are also suspicious, they have ceased attacking us for some reason. They must be planning something, we need to stay on guard".

While the adventurers were misunderstanding things, the situation on the battlefield started changing. The Abomination that was tightly sealed by the pillars started roaring out loud. A spatial tear that was quickly becoming larger, could be seen not far away from it.

The spatial tear had a sinister aura to it, causing anyone gazing at it to feel unsettled. A few seconds later, a figure in a grey robe walked out of it.

The moment they appeared, the entire sky of the sixth trial became dull as if losing colour. What's more the mana in the surroundings also started behaving weirdly as they came in contact with the figure's aura.

Needless to say, this unknown presence naturally attracted the attention of everyone present. All eyes fixed towards the figure in the grey robe. Just as everyone was wondering who this person was, the figure in question made their move.

Their arm transformed into a huge weird sledgehammer as they rushed towards the struggling Abomination in an attempt to finish off the creature.

However, before it could, multiple swords shining with all sorts of skills and a golden blade light came attacking it, forcing it to defend and jump back.

Simon glanced towards Godwin. That attack earlier was by no means a sign of their cooperation. Each of them simply wanted to stop the variable from messing up their trial. The fact still remained that they were still enemies.

After being forced to jump away from the Abomination, the figure muttered some grating incoherent words and shifted its attention to its assailant. The robe on the figure also fell off at this moment, revealing an appearance that surprised all the adventurers.

"What?!! Isn't that Franco? So he was alive?"...

"Wait, why does he look so different? And why did he interfere in the leader's battle?".

The adventurer spoke while looking at the new entrant whose figure resembled a lot like their comrade.

"Something is wrong, Franco was never this strong" Raven remarked feeling that the situation was turning out of control every second.

"Franco?? No, you are not him. Who are you?"

Being so close to the other party, how could Godwin not see the obvious difference between the two? Although there were some similarities, the friend he knew was only a level 600 adventurer, he was never this strong.

The aura that the figure in front of him gave was no less powerful than his own. Other than the difference in level, there was also the obvious difference in appearance.

Although not handsome, Franco could be said to have his own features and strong points. However, the figure had a disfigured face, that only held slight similarities with Franco.

The figure did not speak and continued to mumble rubbish. Perhaps it couldn't speak or maybe it was using a different language. Whatever it was, its gaze was definitely not friendly.

Godwin and the others were confused by the sudden appearance of the unknown Fourth Finger, but not Simon. When he learned the name from the notification, he already had his guess and after seeing the figure in person, he was completely certain.

The Fourth Finger the notification warned them about was one of the fingers from the Hand of Ozymandias, the very same hand that Yelan cut off in the [Historia].

Additionally, he had already encountered and defeated one of the fingers of Ozymandias in the fourth trial, the Fifth Finger that was currently floating around him.

No wonder the finger behaved so unusually ever since coming to the Sixth Trial. It appeared that it was resonating with its own kind.

The Fourth Finger had also detected the presence of the Fifth Finger around Simon and that is why it was muttering gibberish. However, Simon wasn't worried that the Fifth Finger would suddenly rebel and go out of his control after all, the remnant will of Ozymandias no longer dwelled in the finger.

Right now, the Fifth Finger was only a mindless tool that was controlled by Simon.

After muttering some gibberish and stomping its legs in frustration, the fourth finger gave up communicating with the fifth finger. Then it glared menacingly at Simon, Godwin and everyone present in the trial and released its powerful curse energy.

The curse energy that was released by the Fourth finger, was more domineering and oppressive than the curse energy of the finger of Ozymandias on Simon. The two energies combined together and expanded like a pathological plague, affecting everything and everything in this world.

The clouds in the sky turned grey, the snow started melting and even the ground underneath lost its earthy colour. It was as if a new world had opened in this enormous snow covered land.

The powerful curse energy even pressured the divine aura on Godwin's side eating away at it at every second. This caused Godwin to grimace, the fact that the fourth finger was able to overwhelm his divine magic meant that the other party had a highly refined control over their energy, it was clearly even above his own.

Chapter 742 742- River of Destiny & Pride's Authority

Wasting no time, Godwin attacked. The sword in his hand howled with raging winds and divine power and quickly expanded to a size of twenty meters.

"[Resilient Tempest Sword Mastery]- [Ability Conferment]-[Divine Magic Mastery]-[Tempest Magic Master]—[[Resilient Divine Sword]]"

Godwin roared out loud and quickly conjured his skills. A twenty meter huge golden sword radiant with a powerful divine light and tempest magic swept forward towards the Fourth Finger.

The might of the skill created by Godwin was so powerful that it could tear space and travel through it. In the blink of an eye, the sword was already upon the fourth finger.

Godwin's attack did not stop, after attacking the newest variable, he used the lion shield on his left hand to assail Simon. The shield skill of Godwin was no less powerful than his sword skill that he threw at the fifth finger.

Simon responded adeptly, the numerous swords floating around him moved, even the finger of Ozymandias charged.

The peace that had settled into the battlefield, was broken and another clash of epic proportion ensued.

Godwin with his transformation, attacked both Simon and the Fourth Finger. For him, the both of them represented evil that needed to be purged. His morals and justice will never allow him to ally with one evil to fight the other.

And thus a tripartite fight where all the three parties attacked each other, ensued. Simon attacked and defended against both of his enemies, the same went for Godwin and Fourth Finger.

As for the adventurers, Simon was no longer as easygoing as before and commanded the Andromedas to attack them. Since he had the weakest level out of the three, he had to divert off some of the pressure using Revenant Crows and Mk 6.

The chaotic battle became even more chaotic with the addition of the newest variable, the Fourth Finger. The curse skills that he used were powerful enough to plague skills, magic, weapons and even space.

Nothing was unaffected by it, even Godwin was slowly starting to feel the pressure and dread of curse energy as it slowly latched onto him like leeches slowly plaguing his aura. The more he became exposed to it, the more burdensome it became for him.

At this point, Godwin no longer looked as composed and confident as before, facing the curse attacks from both the fourth finger and the finger controlled by Simon, he had a grave face.

The same could be said for the Fourth Finger, facing the divine magic was not an easy task, even the main body had failed when it faced the divine magic user in the ancient times. Much less needs to be said for a finger that only possessed a small fraction of the original body's power.

What aggravated Fourth Finger even more was the other finger that was repeatedly attacking him and getting in his way. Even though they were the parts of the same existence, the fifth finger no longer obeyed the remnant will of their master.

What's more the Fourth Finger couldn't even take control of the fifth finger without the two people getting in its way. The battle between the three was so hectic that none of the parties had the freedom to hold back.

Well, except for Simon who had the aid of his Andromedas, [Thousands Swords mastery], Finger of Ozymandias and most of all, he wasn't affected by the curse energy. It was the same in the previous trials and even now.

For some reason, Simon appeared to be immune to the effects of the curse energy. What's surprising was that he was even able to use the curse energy released by the fourth finger thus empowering his own attacks.

Unless the fourth finger switched to a more refined pattern of attacks, it was hard for simple curse energy to damage Simon. Of course, he did not reveal his advantage to his opponents after all, if they knew about it they would surely make him their first target of elimination.

Besides, even if he was immune to curse energy, the same cannot be said for the divine magic. It was still his bane as ever, and as such, Simon pretended to be hard pressed and be affected by the curse energy while slowly biding his time and waiting for his opponents to exhaust each other.

When the right moment arrives, he would sweep in and use his other trump cards to defeat the exhausted parties thus reaping all the benefits.

And so, the battle continued for an entire day. The time limit set for clearing the trail was also slowly approaching near. There were only over ten hours remaining. If they did not defeat the Abomination by that time, all of them would fail.

Another thing of note was that more than half of the adventurers from Godwin's team had already died at the attacks of the Andromedas. Those who were able to live, were barely hanging on.

The condition of his teammates caused Godwin to no longer be able to fully focus on the battle. Thus causing him to take some loss in exchanges it would have been impossible for him to get hit otherwise.

Simon saw this and was slowly starting to realise that Godwin was getting weaker, his aura was no longer as stabilised as before. How long could he maintain that transformation?

Just as he was thinking that, Godwin who was bathed in a golden light spoke out in a loud commanding tone.

"Listen up everyone. The situation has changed completely out of control. I cannot say with certainty that I will be able to clear the sixth trial. And so I am giving you an order. Use your Transit rocks and get out of here, tell everything that happened here to the guild master. He will know what to do next. Now go".

As Simon had thought, Godwin was telling his subordinates to run away. This was a telltale proof that Godwin had used up all of his trump cards and was no longer confident in coming as a victor in this three way battle.



If he fell, there would be no meaning to their sacrifice, as such, he wanted his comrades to at least get away from here. The adventurers who heard his words, were all devastated, their faces pale.

This was the first time, they heard Godwin give such a command. In all the other situations and perilous circumstances before, he was always the one giving off a positive aura. He would always be the one to lead them out no matter what kind of trouble they faced.

However, this was the first time he gave them an order to retreat. This told them how hopeless the situation was. The adventurers did not blame Godwin, on the contrary, they could understand why he came to this decision.

If anything they felt despair and furious over the fact that in a time like this, they could do nothing but watch from the sidelines as Godwin faced all of the powerful opponents by himself.

The adventurers hesitated questioning what Godwin planned to do. However, when the latter roared at them to run, they finally took out the transit rocks and prepared to leave. It was the same for Raven who had an unwilling expression as he watched his friend face all of the danger alone.

The adventurers prepared to leave; however, how could it be so easy to leave just like that?

"Want to leave? You have to ask my permission first"

Simon glared menacingly. On his command, the army of Andromedas surrounded the adventurers and engaged fiercely. The Mk 6 and the Revenant Crows stepped forward to stop any and all adventurers trying to activate the Transit Rocks.

They even went as far as to self-destruct to stop them. The explosion brought forth by a powerful war machine self destructing could be imagined. Any adventurer who was unlucky enough to get caught, immediately died.

Not even their ashes remained intact.

From this extreme method, it was clear that Simon was hell bent on not letting any adventurers get away, even going as far as to incur a loss like that. However, despite his efforts a few adventurers still made it out alive, Raven was amongst them.

Before disappearing, he glared at Simon with eyes that burned with irreconcilable hatred.

The number of adventurers that managed to escape- 5.

Godwin released a breath of relief when he saw some of his teammates make it out alive. The golden halo covering his body flickered and his transformation soon came undone.

It was as Simon had guessed, Godwin was finally getting weaker. The other party had used up all of their trump cards and even their ace in the hole, the transformation that gave them access to powerful divine magic, came undone. They had no cards left in their sleeve.

As for the fourth finger, it too was struggling from the effects of the divine energy wreaking havoc inside their body just like him. There cannot be any more perfect time.

Simon glanced at the Abomination from the corner of his eyes and after checking its condition, he finally brought out his own trump card.

Artifact Name- Radiant Crown of Brilliance

Rank- Legendary (Missing Spirit)

Stats- Magic +2000

Wielder- Unregistered

Skills- [Divine Absolution], [Infinite Imprisonment], [Damaged], [Damaged], [Damaged]...

The Radiant Crown of Brilliance that he got from the Fourth trial, finally showed its appearance.

As expected, as soon as the artifact appeared, it attracted the attention of the Fourth Finger who trembled ever so slightly. Although it did not have any facial expression, Simon could still make out the fear in him.

Chapter 743 743- River of Destiny & Pride's Authority (2)

The Radiant Crown of Brilliance was a Legendary rank artefact after it was fully restored. It was also the item that had once killed the Atrocity, the Fourth finger was a part of.

Given the vast amount of divinity that was inside the crown, it was only natural for the Fourth Finger to be afraid. In all honesty, even Simon was afraid of this item, if not for the fact that Prime had installed a safety feature, he would not even dare to touch it. After all, the crown was an item that held divine power which was the ultimate bane for his kind.

The Fourth Finger roared frantically. It changed its target from Godwin to Simon who represented the most danger to him right now. However, before it could even come close, golden light burst out of the crown and purified the vicious curse energy that was corroding the place.

[Do you want to use the Legendary grade artefact, the Radiant Crown of Brilliance to purify the Fourth Finger of all evil? YES/NO].

A notification appeared in front of Simon. He extended his finger and hurriedly pressed YES. After that, the scene from the fourth trial repeated once again in front of him. No, the power coming from the crown was even more powerful than before since it was restored now.

Blinding golden light erupted out of the crown engulfing the land and purifying the curse energy as it did. At the same moment, an invisible energy also locked the fourth finger in place. No matter how it struggled, it could not break out of it.

After purifying the land, the golden light condensed to form a breathtaking golden sword that travelled through space and swiftly dug into the body of the Fourth Finger.

"^&\*\$#@^&\$#" the Fourth Finger roared, thick clouds of dark greyish curse energy seeped out of its body and was slowly being purified by the golden sword.

The scene lasted for a while, there was no blood flowing out of the fourth finger, only pure curse energy. After being unable to struggle under the power of the [Divine Absolution], a ball of gas that continuously changed shape, broke out of the body of the fourth finger.

This was the remnant intent of Ozymandias that was left inside its hand that was cut off. The remnant intent tried to escape as soon as it was pulled out of its body. However, before it could, the golden sword turned into chains that quickly wrapped around the intent and bound it in place.

[Do you want to use the legendary grade artefact, Radiant Crown of Brilliance to invoke [Limitless Imprisonment] to seal Ozymandias' remnant intent? YES/NO]

Simon quickly pressed Yes, the development for there was the same, densely packed runes came out of the crown, forming a monolith of some sort around the intent.

After the monolith was completely formed, the intent was captured and the fourth finger was defeated. Simon quickly used Mana Flow to put away the hexagonal shape monolith away.

Counting this one, he now had two intents sealed inside his space ring. Simon did not know what use they had; however, he believed that he could come up with some use for them in the future. For now, it was enough to simply put them away.

Aside from the remnant intent, the lifeless fourth finger was also up for grabs. However, to use it as his tool, he needed to refine it and that needed some time. Simon decided to come for the fourth finger later, for now, he decided to focus his attention on his last enemy.

The three way deadlock had now broken with Simon suddenly bringing out the Radiant Crown of Brilliance and sealing away the fourth finger. Now only the two of them remained, their battle would also determine the outcome of this whole ordeal.

"How is it possible for a demon to use a divine artefact?!!"

In the distance, observing the whole thing, was Godwin as he muttered to himself in shock. He had seen the demon use an artefact that he had witnessed on the fourth trial, Yelan's crown.

It was a legendary artefact that held off the ancient Atrocity and possessed unparalleled divine power. How could an item like that land on the demon's hand? How was he able to use an artefact like that?

At this moment, Godwin started having doubts about the so called beliefs and the teachings he had been taught up until now.

If Demon Nobles were the incarnation of evil, then why was he able to use that artefact? Were the actions that the humans committed on the third trial justified? Was he right in pursuing the demon to the city of Aqualin that day?

Why did his guild master wanted to bring the demon's dungeon down no matter the cost? Wasn't it only natural for the demon to defend his home? Who was right, and who was wrong?

Godwin fell into a mire of self-contemplation. He doubted his guild's action and the reaction of the demon who sought revenge on them. The lives of his comrades that were lost due to their enmity and if it could have been avoided.

Sadly, there was no pill for regret. What had already transpired had transpired, he could not revert it back. Godwin could only face the demon's hatred head on.

"You should be all out of trump cards right? Hehe, it was worth waiting this long"

Simon gave a distorted smile as he activated the [Ancestral Symbol Ignition]. The complex golden black markings on his body burned raising his aura and stats to greater heights.

Now in addition to the hundreds of swords, and the finger of Ozymandias, Godwin would also have to face an empowered Simon while being in a weakened state.

The chance of him winning this battle was null. Godwin too must have realised it since there was no change in his facial expression. He simply composed his breath, took his stance with his sword and prepared for a life and death battle with the demon.

.

.

Simon took off, his speed extremely fast. The burnt sword in his hand danced, sending forth attacks that were imbued with infernal heat. The hundreds of swords shone around him like stars erupting forth with all sorts of skills and the Finger of Ozymandias brought forth the terror of the curse energy.

That was not all, Infernal magic (Advanced) combined with Lightning magic (Intermediate) and Dark magic (Novice) combined with Tempest magic (Advanced), to wreak havoc on Godwin.

The magic training that Simon had undergone under Irene, the [Amalgamation Magic] that had broken through its restraints, was showing its might.

BOOOM... Ground collapsed, sinister cracks ran through the sky and the laws of the sixth trial went awry.

After activating all of his skills and trump cards, Simon was like an unstoppable force. Wild and domineering, like the ruler of the battlefield.

Forget about putting up any resistance, Godwin was not even able to take a single hit from the current Simon. He was so powerful that he was completely sweeping the ground with his opponent.

This was no longer a battle but a one sided display of superiority. Godwin tasted the taste of blood in his mouth as he slammed into the ground with a single powerful hit from the demon.

Weirdly enough, he felt that something about this scene was strange. The other party was very strong and not to mention that he was completely exhausted, if they wanted to they could easily kill him and be done with this whole thing.

Yet the other party was deliberately holding back and suppressing their attacks enough so that it wasn't lethal.

"Nostalgic isn't it? This was how I felt when you trampled upon me when we met for the first time. At that time, I was barely around level 300, not at all your match. If you wanted to, you could have easily defeated me".

"Yet you didn't do that and instead, you deliberately suppressed your strength throughout our battle to make me recognise the vast gulf between in our strengths. You wanted to crush my spirits as you slowly overwhelmed all of my skills at that time".

"How can I forget a humiliation like that? At that time I endured the assaults of you and your guild, do you know why? It's because I have absolute confidence in myself and that as long as I had enough time, I would one day be able to repay all that humiliation a hundredfold in the future"

Simon became chatty all of a sudden as he humiliated Godwin, slowly crushing his belief and confidence. Every time the latter picked themselves up, he would send them crashing down on the ground to taste the dust once again.

Skills, Stats, Items or even numbers, he crushed him in every front. In the end, Simon even bore down on the other and used his foot to plant Godwin's nose to the ground.

How long had he waited for this day to come? Today he had finally repaid all of the suffering and ignominy he suffered that day.

Simon was intoxicated by this feeling and involuntarily sought more of it.

"Why don't you use the Transit Rock and try to escape just like your comrades did?" he asked looking down on the knight who was doing his best to stand on his feet even while being pressed down.

Of course, Simon had no intentions of letting his opponent use the transit rock to escape. It was fine if it was others; however, Godwin was one of the backbones of the Sea God's Trident guild and one of

his enemies. He had to die here in this trial no matter what.

744 Chapter 744- River Of Destiny & Pride's Authority (3)

"If I can't even purge the evil in front of me, there is no meaning in escaping. Just kill me, I would rather die than live while enduring this kind of shame" Godwin proclaimed, his tone was still as unbending and defiant as even after suffering from all that humiliation.

Simon was inwardly a little impressed by the spirit of this knight. It needs to be mentioned that he was continuously using the dark magic to corrupt and break the mind of the knight. However, Godwin's resilience and spirit was far out of ordinary and was not something that could be broken easily.

That kind of mental fortitude, not just anyone can cultivate it. It was a pity that he was his enemy.

"Since you desire so, then I will gladly grant you death" Simon flashed his jagged teeth and brought his sword up.

Although he was impressed by his opponent's resolve, it didn't mean that it changed anything. Both of them were still enemies and it would have been him in Godwin's place had he been weaker.

In his case, his end would have been even more miserable. There was no place for compassion, kindness or mercy here. It was the survival of the fittest.

Simon clenched his sword tightly, activated his skills and brought it down on Godwin in a stabbing motion to finish him for once and all, when—[Quickly back away from him]— a voice sounded in his head.

What was going on?

Instinctively, Simon moved away from Godwin using [Flash Steps] and stared at the latter. At the very instant he moved, the space around Godwin started crumbling, golden light overflowed from his body and started flowing into the void.

[The Fragments of has detected a threat to its wielder's life. The exclusive power of the Third Solstice will be temporarily activated].

A notification arrived in front of the puzzled Simon. The other party suddenly started acting weirdly and then there was this notification. Could it be that Godwin still had another trump card up his sleeve?

What was the Fragments mentioned in the notification? Before Simon could ponder about the sudden inexplicable situation, he felt a powerful invisible force locking onto him and pulling him towards the place beyond the shattered space.

[Detected that you are pulled towards the unknown domain. All progress will temporarily halt]

Another notification notifying him of the bizarre event appeared in front of him.

What was going on? What was the unknown domain? Simon tried to resist the pull; however, in front of that force, his resistance amounted to nothing. Soon, he was pulled into the place beyond the fractured space and disappeared there along with Godwin.



Space slowly mend itself and the world of the Sixth Trial returned to its former peace. The Abomination sealed by the pillars, continued to roar endlessly; however, there was no one to hear its cries.

.

.

Inside the unknown domain, Simon opened his eyes to find himself in a vast black realm. Hidden and untouched by the light of the stars, the place appeared to be an enigmatic void where the very fabric of reality seemed to fold in itself. It was very difficult to make any sense of this place since one's perception didn't work here.

As Simon gazed around blankly wondering where this place was, his eyes inadvertently moved towards a vast river that stretched endlessly. It was a breathtaking sight that defied all logic and comprehension.

Like a shimmering tapestry of liquid silver that wove through the very heart of this endless expanse, the river flowed with raging currents. Simon seemed to see something inside the waters, it was blurry as if it was shrouded in mystery.

The waters of the river was both ancient and timeless, a conduit of fate that transcended the boundaries of worlds and dimensions. It was as if the river held the collective consciousness of the universe within its depths.

Its surface glistened with an otherworldly radiance, its currents flowing with a hypnotic grace that defied conventional understanding. It felt like a living entity, a repository of destinies, and a guardian of the past, present, and future.

The River of Destiny held within it the profound and the mundane, the extraordinary and the ordinary

—all coexisting in a harmonious dance.

As Simon stood at its banks marvelling at the magnificent scene that lay in front of him, the voice within him spoke once again.

[The River of Destiny... be careful not to get swept by its current. Once you enter the River of Destiny, you will never be able to get out, your life in this progression will be forfeited. Also, make sure not to gaze at your own past or the future; otherwise, you will receive a tremendous backlash. Don't say that I didn't warn you at that time].

The voice stopped sounding after they said their peace. Simon did not have to think much to know who that voice belonged to. It was the voice of none other than the Second Fragment.

This thing that had suddenly stopped all communication with him ever since he woke up from his comatose state. For it to talk to him once again, it could only mean that the place he was in was that dangerous.

Simon increased his caution as he tried to make sense of what was in front of him. Thanks to the second Fragment, he at least understood that the river in front of him was called the River of Destiny.

The River of Destiny had no end to its flow. Its horizon remained elusive, a distant mirage that beckoned with promises of undiscovered realms and untold tales.

The River of destiny seemed to defy the very concept of time, where past, present, and future intertwined seamlessly. Yet, this river was not singular in its nature. It was a nexus of tributaries, each one branching out in every conceivable direction.

These tributaries represented worlds, realities, and destinies—each a unique story waiting to be unfolded. They flowed together in chaotic harmony, an ever-changing symphony of possibilities.

What Simon saw inside its water was the past, present, future and the various possibilities of the destinies of others. The River of Destiny was a reflection of the universe itself, a mirror that revealed the souls and destinies of beings across the vast cosmos.

Then there was also the various unknown life forms swimming inside the depth of its waters. From titanic creatures more than hundreds of thousands of kilometres big to small jellyfish looking creatures, all kinds of mysterious and enigmatic lives can be found in here.

There were also numerous Koi fish running against the current of the river. From golden-yellow, to red and black, there were all colours of Koi fish there. Even the Yin Yang koi fish that Simon summoned inside his dungeon, was from this place.

As Simon gazed into the river, images started reflecting on the surface of the water, faces, both familiar and unknown, appeared in the river of destiny. Each image showed a story both fulfilled and unfulfilled, like a life waiting to be lived.

It was as if the river held the very essence of existence within its shimmering waters. Simon also saw the faces of his friends from his past life, their destinies and the life they led. Their past, present and future all flowed inside the River of Destiny.

Simon who was enthralled by the inexplicable thing in front of him, suddenly recalled the appearance of a particular woman. Would she also be here? What possible lives could she have led if she didn't meet him?

Simon suddenly became curious. His steps subconsciously brought him very close to the vast River of Destiny. Just as he was about to extend his hand in a trance to find the destiny of the woman who was very close to him in his previous life, the voice of the Second Fragment sounded inside his head again.

This time its tone was a little frantic and outraged.

[What are you planning to do? Get away from the river, do not even think about touching it or else you will die. The river may look still from the surface but make no mistake, its currents are flowing at a speed that you can't even begin to perceive at your current level. One mistake and you will be turned into nothingness forever flowing in the river of destiny].

The voice of the second fragment woke Simon out of his daze and he hurriedly retracted his hands back.

What was he trying to do just now? Was he trying to touch the river of destiny? If he got swept by its current, then... just the thought of it sent shivers down Simon's spine and he hurriedly backed away.

[Don't just stay there standing in a daze, quickly get out of here. This place isn't something someone of your level should come in contact with. Time holds no dominion here, for past, present, and future are all merged in the existence that is the River of Destiny].

[To traverse these waters is to witness the birth of galaxies and the fall of civilizations with but a glance. You might feel like only a few seconds have passed here, but days or even weeks must have passed by in the outside world. If you stay here any longer, you will be affected by its Mnemonic Pull again causing your memories and state of self to slip away. By the time you wake up from it, it will already be too late. If you get it then get a hold of yourself].

Simon nodded his head and cleared his mind. The fact that he was pulled into the Mnemonic Pull of the river of Destiny, without him realising it, spoke volumes of the danger of this place.

#### 745 Chapter 745- River Of Destiny & Pride's Authority (4)

Simon was clearly out of his place here, the River of Destiny wasn't something he should come in contact with at his current level.

He turned around no longer looking at the river and moved towards the area from where he came in. However, the broken space had already mended itself and there was no longer an exit he could take to go back.

Just as he was about to ask the second fragment how to get out of here, from the corner of his eyes, he spotted a figure that was similarly floating around the River of Destiny just like him.

Needless to say, the other party was Godwin. Earlier, when the golden light burst out of the latter's body, both of them were pulled inside this unknown domain. The fact that he was dragged here, was their doing.

Simon's killing intent soared, he had to kill the other party and finish what he started no matter what. The notification he got earlier about some Third Fragment activating something after detecting danger on their wielder, also weighed at the corner of his mind.

Godwin seemed to have no shortage of trump cards, only by killing him will he be able to have some peace of mind.

[What are you trying to do? Forget about the other party and get away from here. Although your level and comprehension of the world and its truth is not at the desired level yet to handle my powers, I will lend you my [Authority] this once].

Simon continued to move towards Godwin. He was not ignoring the Second Fragment, but the notification weighed on his mind. In the end, his desire to kill his opponent won over his desire to escape.

Simon arrived before Godwin and noticed that the latter seemed to be acting a little unusual. Their eyes were covered with a golden light and they seemed to be in an unconscious state.

Simon hesitated for a second not knowing what kind of phenomenon the other party was going through. Though in the end, he decided to attack. He activated his skills only to realise that he was unable to use any of his skills or magic.

[The Fateweaver's Energy around the River of Destiny is too strong, it renders all skills and magic useless. Unless it is a higher level power like the Laws, forget about even trying to attack]

The Second Fragment sounded. It appeared that he was unable to use any skills or magic here. Then how should he attack? Should he just give up here?

No, that was not like him. Who knew when he would get another chance like this? It was clear to him that his opponent was going through a special transformation. If he gave up here, he would just leave endless trouble for the future. He needed to grab this chance and snuff this seed of uncertainty that was Godwin.

"I can't use skills or magic here, then I'll just use physical force and throw him into the River of Destiny. You said that falling there means certain death right? Then it's the only way"

Simon started moving, he grabbed the unconscious Godwin and started pushing the latter towards the River of Destiny.

The other party did not struggle which made it all the more easier for him. Just as he neared a certain range towards the colossal River of Destiny, the voice of the Second Fragment cautioned.

[Be careful, you have entered the Third boundary of the River of Destiny, the Temporal Eddy. Here the Mnemonic pull is several times higher. Not only that, time behaves erratically here. There are numerous time loops forming around this boundary. If you are not careful, you will forever be caught 14:48

in it and be pulled into the River of Destiny].

Simon nodded, he was already aware of the dreadfulness of the River of Destiny. As such, he did not relax his nerves for even a second.

After the third boundary, Simon entered the fourth, he only stopped near the fifth boundary and did not enter it. The reason was obvious, even he could tell that once he entered the fifth boundary he would not be able to return.

The gravitational force around the fifth boundary was so strong that everything was crushed, causing black holes to form.

Now all he needed to do was simply push Godwin forward and the fifth boundary will do the rest. Once they entered the gravitational pull of the fifth boundary, they would only have one end and that was to fall into the River of Destiny and die.

Simon did not dilly dally and hurriedly commenced his plans. However, what he forgot to take into account in his plan was Godwin suddenly regaining his consciousness at the last second.

"Hehehe... So this is how it was. The River of Destiny, Althaea, the Fragments... I understand some of it now. To think that it is even capable of something like this... what are the Fragments of the greater constellations?"

He suddenly turned around and grabbed Simon.

[Be careful]

With that, the both of them were pulled into the fifth boundary and were immediately affected by the fierce gravitational pull.

"Shit!! let go of me" Simon cursed, trying to break out of the gravitational force of the fifth boundary. However, in front of the presence of the River of Destiny, his own existence was seemingly smaller than a speck of dust. How could he create any waves?

He was quickly pulled into the sixth boundary and towards the River of Destiny. If he got swept in its current, everything would be over.

Would he die here?

"Demon it looks like you are in possession of some fragments too. No wonder you were able to defeat me. However, this is it for both you and me. The Fragments within me have shown me my destiny, but I am unwilling to accept it. I will not tolerate evil and will continue on my own path".

With that, the knight named Godwin fell into the River of Destiny. It did not even take a second for his body to be torn apart and turned into nothingness.

[So the Fragments of [■■■■■■■■■■] has finally found a worthy inheritor huh]

The second fragment muttered. However, Simon had no mind to pay attention to its rambling right because he knew that his outcome would not be any different than Godwin's.

[There is no way in hell that is your end]

Just as that voice fell, Simon's mind banked out and he found himself in an endless white space with no end or beginning in sight.

This place was the mysterious space where he met the second fragment and his other self.

Simon observed the insufferably arrogant guy in front of him and spoke "We meet again".

Unlike the last time when he was in his human appearance and his other self in demonic, this time the both of them were in their actual demonic appearances.

That being said, there was still no comparison between the two. Simon's other self still had that otherworldly awe-inspiring and domineering aura that he could not even begin to compare with.

Whether it be charisma, disposition, natural bearing and although he hated to admit it, the other party's looks were also far greater than his own.

'Why is that guy more handsome even though we are the same person?' Simon wondered in his head.

"We meet again?!! Ah, you might be talking about that guy. That cocky narcissistic bastard who thinks he is better than everyone. Isn't he just too much? Anyways, that is not important right now. I see that you are in a pinch. Hey, do you want to live or not?" The other's Simon tone suddenly turned serious from wacky.

Simon nodded his head, his expression grave. Truth be told, he was really in an unprecedented pinch where he did not know what he should do to save himself. He had already seen what happened of Godwin after he fell into the River of Destiny, he didn't want to add into to the list.

There were still so many things he had to do, dreams that remained unfulfilled and promises that needed to be kept. He cannot die here in some unfathomable River of Destiny.

"Good, it appears that we are on the same page. Then listen to me, the Second Fragment has already exhausted its Primordial Energy unlocking the second [Authority] for you. It can no longer communicate with you for a while].

[If you want to live then listen to me very carefully. No skill or magic you have can do anything about the Fateweaver's Energy of the River of Destiny. Not even some Laws can temper with the Fateweaver's force. Only a higher energy that can sever the cause and effects of the River of Destiny, can save you right now].

[Remember well, the second [Authority] of the Fragments of Pride, [[Stellar Eclipse]]. This [Authority] can manipulate the primordial energy of the universe. It allows the Second Fragment of Pride to twist the very fabric of causality and effects. [[Stellar Eclipse]] severs the traditional bonds between cause and effect, granting the user the extraordinary ability to manifest the inconceivable as if it were an inherent truth].

[With this authority, any exclusive power, divine essence, or esoteric force can be negated without perturbing the delicate balance of the cosmos. Remember, your current level and strength are insufficient to use the [Authorities] of the Fragments of Pride. To use it you will need to..."

.

.

The dream ended after a while and Simon was back in front of the River of Destiny.



## Chapter 746- Guiding Lights

The waters of the River of Destiny that looked still but were instead moving at a speed inconceivable to time was just a few inches away from Simon. It was now or never.

If he wanted to survive, he had to activate it without fail and so, Simon took a deep breath and erupted forth with a loud crisp voice.

"I am the Zenith of all creation, the very peak of existence. Everything that transpires in this vast universe is dancing in the palm of my hands"...

[Pride has been activated, all other emotions have been forcibly snuffed].

"Remember, your current level and strength are insufficient to use the [Authorities] of the Fragments of Pride. To use it you will need to agitate your innate arrogance and raise it to a whole new level. There needs to be no doubt left inside you and only then can you activate the second [Authority]. When you get out there, make sure to scream those words at the top of your lungs. Hehe... it will work"

These were the words that his other self told him. At that time, he wanted to ask the other party if saying those embarrassing words would even work. However, before he could do, his other self sent him back. To have absolute confidence in himself and not even a shred of doubt should be left within him. Simon did not know what to do to achieve such a state as such, the fastest thing he could think of in that sublime moment was to utter those self inspirational corny words that his other self told him to do.

.

.

Words can sometimes hold power, far beyond the simple conveyance of information. They possess the remarkable ability to shape one's thoughts, feelings, and actions, often influencing the reality in profound ways.

They can also serve as affirmations of one's capabilities and potential. For example, when someone declares, "I can do it" or "I am strong," they're reinforcing their self belief.

These affirmations, even if seemingly corny, can combat the inner critic that fuels self-doubt. The words uttered by Simon might sound corny, but to him, it had the magical effect of bolstering his confidence.

It transformed his doubts into unwavering belief, hesitation into resolve, demotivation into inspiration, negative emotion into positive emotion and despair into hope.

Words that could rally him, boost his focus, and help his psyche and disperse all of his fears, was what he needed the most at this moment facing the despair inducing River of Destiny.

So in essence, saying those words worked wonders, it propelled his arrogance to colossal heights, conquered his doubts, swelled his ego and gave him a faux sense of invincibility. It was then that the second [Authority] of the Fragments of Pride—[[Stellar Eclipse]] was activated.

An enigmatic and profound change occurred, space around Simon solidified and quickly turned black. Like a cocoon, the black shroud enveloped Simon protecting him and severing him from the outside world.

Cryptic letters and patterns appeared around the surface of the black shroud. Like a closely knit entity, they stretched and spiralled around the black shroud. These patterns seemed to mirror the vast stars and constellations of the universe and their mysteries.

The appearance of the Black Shroud around Simon caused the gravitational pull and even the Fateweaver's Energy around the River to Destiny to tremble.

The River, which seemed like an immutable force that dictated the flow of destinies, pasts, and futures, now quivered in the presence of Simon's [Authority]. Its waters, which had once seemed invincible and all-encompassing, became malleable, unable to do anything to Simon.

Inside the black shroud, Simon gazed at the shell covering him. It was impossible to see within the shroud from the outside. However, from the inside, Simon could see everything just fine.

He could tell that he fell into the river of destiny. However, thanks to the Second Authority, [[Stellar Eclipse]], he was able to still live even after falling into it. The currents of the River of Destiny was unable to tear him apart.

"It's as if I have severed the threads of causality itself"

Simon could tell that an unparalleled power was flowing through the black shroud. This power that grasped the laws of causality and severed the very cause and effect relationship that bound the entire world, was the very thing that was currently saving him from the river of Destiny.

Simon marvelled at the power of the Second Authority, he vaguely felt that severing the cause and effect and shielding him like that, wasn't everything that this power was capable. It had a much more profound use.

Unfortunately, his current level was too low to even understand it.

Although that was the case, the second authority was still one of the powers of his Fragments as such, he felt a faint familiarity with it. He felt like he could manipulate this power somewhat in his current state.

"Let's give it a try" To his pleasant surprise, he really was able to control this power. The [[Stellar Eclipse]] moved just as the way he willed it.

Now Simon could move freely inside the River of Destiny without getting carried away by its currents. And so he tried to get out of the River of Destiny. However, no matter how he moved or in which direction he went, he was unable to get out.

The River of Destiny was so vast that it was impossible to make sense of where one was going. Not only that, but its unfathomable nature that merged all laws and defied all concepts, made it a treacherous stretch to navigate.

The more Simon struggled to find an exit, the more he felt as though he was trapped in an eternal loop, forever ensnared by the river's grasp. It became increasingly apparent that escaping the River of Destiny was no simple feat.

Simon's attempts to devise strategies to break out of the River all proved futile. It was as if the river itself had consciousness of its own, deliberately trapping him and resisting his attempts to break free.

This was not good, although he was safe from the Fateweaver's Energy of the River of Destiny, he was now trapped in here.

"Dammit, you should have told me a way to get out of here"

Simon cursed. His other self only taught him the method to activate the Second authority. They did not say anything about a situation like this where he would be trapped.

What should he do? In the midst of his panic and frustration, Simon noticed two luminous orbs of light swimming against the relentless tides of the River of Destiny, swiftly drawing near him.

These luminous orbs of light when they reached a certain visible distance, he was able to make out that it was two black and white lights.

In just a few couple of seconds, they were already in front of Simon and circled outside the protective cocoon of his [[Stellar Eclipse]]. The true nature of the Black and white light also became clear at this moment.

They were none other than Yin Yang Koi fish. Simon already knew that the River of Destiny had given birth to many enigmatic life forms. However, the ones in front of him were different.

Seeing how he felt a sense of familiarity from them, he realised that these Yin Yang Koi Fish were the very same ones he had summoned inside his dungeon. It appeared that they returned to the River of Destiny after sensing his predicament.

"Hm? What are they trying to do?"

Simon saw that the two koi fish were acting a little unusual. They swam around in a deliberate pattern almost as if trying to communicate with him through their movements.

Could it be that the Yin Yang Koi fish were guiding him?

Did they know how to exit this place?

Simon suddenly realised that the Yin Yang Koi fish might be the ticket to his exit. After all, if you think about it, these Yin Yang Koi Fish were a life form that was born in the River of Destiny. This place was their home, so of course they would know all about this place.

Simon trusted his instincts and followed these mysterious existences which according to Irene had connected with his fate and destiny and were a good symbol that would one day have a great impact on his destiny.

The Yin Yang Koi Fish led him through a breathtaking and fantastical path that defied his imagination. The River of Destiny that stretched out endlessly, contained many mystical phenomena and creatures with otherworldly appearances.

Some resembled ancient beings with no form, some had forms that could hardly be described, while others embodied different aspects of things.

Simon observed all sorts of creatures as he made his passage through the River of Destiny. Thanks to the [[Stellar Eclipse]] isolating him from the outside, these creatures weren't able to sense him or else, things might have not gone this smoothly.

As for the Yin yang Koi Fish, from colossal creatures to even the weirdest organisms, gave way to them as if showing their respects.

With Yin yang koi fish as his guide, they ventured deeper into the heart of the river. At that place, Simon's senses were overwhelmed by the sight of a peculiar realm that appeared and disappeared within the mist.

It was a place that seemed to exist in a perpetual state of flux, an intersection between the real and the surreal. When Simon looked closely, he noticed that at the very centre of this ethereal realm, an

awe-inspiring palace stood imposingly.

Chapter 747 747- Gladion Astrid Onyx

The palace's grandeur was beyond comprehension, with spires that disappeared into heights unknown and walls adorned with intricate patterns that danced with all sorts of unique colours.

The magnificent palace, with its towering spires and cosmic adornments, was a sight to behold. However, its existence within the River of Destiny was like a paradox in itself.

What's more, the palace that was covered with an aura of transience disappeared as soon as Simon laid his eyes on it, making him doubt whether what he saw was real or not.

A palace in the middle of nowhere... was the River of Destiny playing tricks on him? Was it a mere illusion, a tantalizing mirage conjured by the river's capricious currents? Or was it a glimpse into something that existed beyond the boundaries of his current understanding?

Given the nature of the river, it was only natural for Simon to doubt that. In any case, the Yin Yang Koi Fish continued to guide Simon through this surreal landscape, gliding effortlessly through the ever-shifting currents.

As they pressed forward, they approached what could only be described as the exit—a mystical gateway that transcended the concepts of space, time, destiny and even reality.

Somewhere at the heart of this crossroads, a staggeringly long fracture like a tear in the very fabric of existence, ran through. It was as though all things converged upon this singular point, and it was here that the River of Destiny revealed its most profound mystery.

The fracture appeared as a rift in the very fabric of the universe, a hairline breach in the order itself. Looking at that fracture, Simon just instinctively knew it. This was his exit he was looking for, the only thing in this vast River of Destiny that can lead him out.

The Yin yang Koi Fish really did guide him to the exit, he was very relieved. At the same time, he was starting to believe that the Yin Yang Koi Fish might really have a deep impact on his destiny.

Although he still did not know what purpose they served or why they came to him through the [????????] (Abyss) option of his, they helped him navigate through the river, he would be more aware of them from now on.

And so, Simon started moving towards the immeasurably massive fracture. As he stood before it, he felt the weight of all existence pressing upon him.

It was unfathomable to him how such a staggeringly huge fracture came to be in the River of Destiny and who or what had created it. It was a complete mystery, one that teased the boundary of his existence.

Yet looking at that massive tear in the fabric of existence, Simon felt an undeniable allure towards it. It was hard to describe this feeling, it was both nerve wracking and exhilarating.

If he took a few more steps and dived into the fracture, he would be out of here. Who would have known that a place like the River of Destiny really existed in some corner of the universe?

Who would have thought that he would be pulled into such a place on his trip to the Forbidden Grounds?

What's more, him making it out of it alive even after falling into the river. It all seemed too farfetched to be true, yet it was the undeniable reality.

All sorts of thoughts crossed Simon's mind as he stepped into the fracture and exited the River of Destiny.

Was everything that happened in the sixth trial from him meeting Godwin to being pulled into the River of Destiny all an accident, a twist of fortune, or was it part of a larger machination by the forces that governed destiny?

And what ripple effects would this encounter have on the tapestry of his own destiny?

-----

Kingdom of Blackthorn, Capital City.

Obsidian Hold was a thriving metropolis that stood as a testament to absolute order and authority. Its architecture, characterized by towering spires and colossal citadels, was imposing and unyielding, much like the very governance that ruled over it.

The buildings here had a harmonious blend of elegance and strength to them. The long spires of the towers here reached towards the skies, and the obsidian stones that they were made of, gleamed under the sun.

The city's layout was both strategic and imposing, a reflection of the nation's martial focus. The demographics of the Kingdom of Blackthorn was very intriguing and vastly different from the Kingdom of Ellesmere in that, more than sixty per cent of its population toiled under the banner of the throne, their lives dedicated to the kingdom's military endeavours.

It was a society shaped by discipline and duty, where the concept of service to the realm held paramount importance.

In this kingdom, the concept of individual freedom was a luxury few could afford. Here, the citizens were not at liberty to choose their own professions or destinies. Every aspect of their lives, from their employment to their roles within society, was meticulously decided and controlled by the throne.

It was a nation where personal choice gave way to unwavering obedience.

Being the capital city of the nation, the atmosphere of Obsidian Hold was one of stern discipline and regimented order. The people lived their lives under the watchful gaze of the royal bloodline, whose name struck both awe and fear into the hearts of the populace.

This royal dynasty, known as the "Onyx Sovereigns," ruled with an iron fist, ensuring that every citizen served the kingdom's interests.

In such a tightly controlled society, there was no room for institutions like an adventurers' guild. High-level individuals, those who possessed exceptional skills and abilities, were not free agents seeking their own fortunes.

Instead, they were conscripted into service for the throne, their talents harnessed to bolster the kingdom's might.

Inside the Throne room of the Onyx Royal Palace...

The room matching the ambience of the capital was crafted with dark black stones. Every surface and corner was constructed with sleek obsidian and the dark, polished stone gave the chamber an eerie, almost dark atmosphere.

The light itself seemed to be absorbed by these stones, casting the room in perpetual twilight. Tall spires of black stone framed the space, their sharp angles reflecting the architectural aesthetics of the kingdom and its lost standing traditions.

Despite the grandeur of the surroundings, the Throne Room was eerily silent, devoid of any courtly entourage or advisors. There were only two figures occupying this imposing expanse, seated opposite each other upon the two chairs prepared.



One of the figures had an appearance that demanded respect and instilled fear in the hearts of those who gazed upon him. His tall, imposing figure was encased in a suit of obsidian black armor that seemed to meld seamlessly with his form and he wore a crown that was fashioned like a fierce predatory bird upon his head.

They had piercing eyes, square jaws, long black hair and stoic face that made them appear stern and handsome at the same time. Whether it be their aura or their disposition, they exuded an undeniable aura of authority and strength.

Yet mixed within their presence, there was a faint greyish black eerie energy that gave others an unsettling feeling. The figure was none other than the king of this kingdom, Gladion Astrid Onyx.

Seated opposite him, was a tall youthful figure with a sickly face. Their slender frame was draped in robes of the richest midnight blue silk, adorned with intricate silver embroidery.

Despite their sickly pallor, their face was strikingly handsome, framed by long, sandy beige hair. Their eyes, a shade of deep amethyst, held a languid smile that seemed to conceal countless secrets. It was a smile that spoke of knowledge and cunning, a mind constantly at work behind those enigmatic eyes.

The youth's presence was prominent and did not get eclipsed at all by the striking presence of the ruler of the Kingdom of Blackthorn, making it clear that they were no ordinary visitor.

What's more, from their robe one could unmistakably see the motif of the Kingdom of Ingolf, a symbol of wealth and opulence.

If Simon was here, he would immediately recognise the person, Oman Amil Ingolf, the crown prince of the Kingdom of Ingolf who had once brought his entourage with him to participate in the Battle of the Finest organised by the Kingdom of Ellesmere.

This person had also once tried to make things difficult for Simon in the auction held by Cynthia's Serene Palace Merchant Guild. For them to visit the Kingdom of Blackthorn and even meet its king one would have to think that they were definitely planning something.

Gladion's gaze remained fixed on Oman as he listened to the proposal. After a while, an oppressive aura descended onto the room as Gladion spoke.

"Crown prince Oman, the thing that you are asking of my kingdom is not possible?" his tone measured but firm.

"Your Majesty should give it some thought first" Oman leaned back in his chair, a languid smile playing at his lips.

"Hehe, it's not like the Kingdom of Blackthorn lacks soldiers. After all, you have conscripted every individual with potential under your banner. When it comes to the knight orders, your kingdom has the highest number of them in the entire northwestern region, no other nation comes close. I'm sure that your majesty finds my proposal appealing"

Oman's words were not unfounded, the Kingdom of Blackthorn had forged a society that valued uniformity and unity above all else.

It was a realm where individuality was subjugated to the collective, and where the strength of the kingdom was paramount.

#### Chapter 748 748- Gladion Astrid Onyx (2)

The Kingdom of Blackthorn was not always like this. It was not the monolithic bastion of control and conformity that it had become under the rule of Gladion Astrid Onyx.

In the days of old, it was a realm just like any other kingdom, characterized by a balance between freedom and progress, where personal opinions and choices were respected, and governance was less draconian.

However, everything changed with the unexpected ascension of Gladion Astrid Onyx to the throne. That is to say, the Kingdom of Blackthorn was what it was now, a powerhouse among the third grade nations was all due to this man in front of him.

"Hehe, it's not a secret anymore that your kingdom wants to gobble the kingdom of Ellesmere up. However, if you continue with this Salami tactic by backing the Second Prince up to the throne, it will take years or even a decade to eat the meal that is the Kingdom of Ellesmere"

"It is currently in a state of upheaval and in its most vulnerable state with most of its strong men and women out of the picture. If your kingdom wants to take control of Ellesmere, it would be far more efficient to send your military and knight orders in to invade it".

"Of course, a large scale movement like attacking another nation needs a ton of resources, manpower and political manoeuvrings. Our kingdom of Ingolf is ready to back Blackthorn with all the necessary resources and political support. You can say that we are ready to cover all the expenses needed for such a move. All Blackthorn needs to do is move their military and reap the reward. What does your majesty think?"

Oman offered, his voice was still as indolent and nonchalant as ever. As if everything that was being discussed was some trivialities and not sensitive state secrets.

Gladion remained silent for a moment, his piercing gaze locked onto Oman's. The possibilities, risks, and rewards weighed heavily in the air. The fate of not one but two kingdoms hung in the balance, and the enigmatic ruler of Blackthorn had a momentous decision to make.

He knew that the other party definitely had some scheme for backing the kingdom of Ellesmere and if he did not read carefully, he might step on a landmine and destroy everything that he had built up until now.

That said, the allure of gobbling up the kingdom of Ellesmere was a difficult thing to give up especially when the other party said that they would cover all the expense and resources that was needed.

"Do you take me for a fool? Even considering the fact that Ingolf does back us up to take the Kingdom of Ellesmere, are you trying to tell me to believe that you have no motive behind all this? What guarantee is there that when our Blackthorn moves its military towards the Ellesmere, you won't be taking this chance to attack us through our backyard?"

Hearing Gladion's words, Oman who was lazily sipping on his wine, suddenly started chuckling. His chuckle turned into a bawling laughter which echoed throughout the entire throne room. Seeing that demeanour of his, no one would be able to tell that he was a Crown prince of a nation.

"I see... a fine judgment. I guess if I were in your place, I would think the same. However, Your Majesty are you underestimating our kingdom of Ingolf? Something like occupying new lands holds no meaning to us right now. And even if we wanted to, who can stop us as we are right now?"

"Your Majesty should have already gotten the news by now, our Kingdom of Ingolf is no longer a Third Grade country but has been promoted to Second Grade. We now have two powerful rankers in our midst. So if we wanted to take control of any land, it would be all too easy for us"

"Your Majesty can be assured that Ingolf does not have any intentions on Blackthorn, instead our motive is something else. It would be better if you don't pry on it. So, what does your majesty think of my proposal? I'm sure the person who orchestrated the Bloody Succession of the Kingdom of Blackthorn, the 'Lord of Iron Will' will not give up on such an opportunity"

Oman glanced at Gladion Astrid Onyx and smiled fiercely. Many people had underestimated him, for he was a bastard whose mother was just an ordinary maid in the castle. Forget about a pure blood, he was not even a proper half blood. He had no qualification or business to butt his nose in the royal succession. He wasn't even considered a candidate.

However, Gladion proved them all wrong, demonstrating unmatched strength and an unquenchable thirst for power in the royal selection.

It was a bloody history in the annals of the Kingdom of Blackthorn, the new king who killed all of his royal siblings and competitors in a cold and ruthless move in front of the crowd sending shockwaves throughout the kingdom.

However, this new king was not merely content with securing his own throne, with swift and brutal efficiency, Gladion decapitated the heads of every corrupted noble and official, severing the tendrils of treachery that had infiltrated the kingdom.

He established a militaristic reign, one where the will of the throne would brook no dissent. This drastic transformation earned him a title among the people, one that reflected his iron-fisted rule.

They began to refer to him as the "Lord of Iron Will," a moniker that signified both his unyielding resolve and the unwavering control he exerted over the kingdom.

Gladion mulled over Oman's proposal, and after a while, his eyes displayed a fierce resolution as he made his choice.

"Alright, if Ingolf is ready to cover the expenses needed for such a large scale expedition, then Blackthorn has no reason to turn your proposal down. Blackthorn will attack Ellesmere; however, you should know that such a big move would need careful planning and time. We won't be able to move very soon"

The Kingdom of Blackthorn was a militaristic nation. If they weren't going to use their military, then what was the point?

"We leave that to your discretion. You have the freedom to move however way you want in this matter. We only want you to take over Ellesmere"

Oman and Gladion, the leader of the two countries shook their hands, sealing the deal. From there on, they finalised on a few finer details of the plan before Oman took his leave.

Once Oman departed, an eerie silence descended upon the chamber. Gladion remained in his seat, his thoughts concealed behind a stoic facade. Nobody knew what he was thinking at this moment.

After some time, Gladion rose from his seat and started walking towards his throne. The throne made of obsidian structure, looked imposing and darkly magnificent.

Gladion strode toward the throne with measured steps, and looked at it with a sense of purpose. His hands stroked the throne and pressed on a concealed mechanism. Slowly, the throne shifted, revealing a hidden entrance beneath—a secret stairwell leading into the depths of the kingdom's underground.

As Gladion descended the secret stairwell, a chill enveloped him. The air here was cool and damp, and the sound of his footsteps echoed softly in the confined space. Torches in sconces along the stone walls illuminated the way with flickering flames, casting eerie shadows.

The hidden underground chamber, concealed beneath the throne room, was a place steeped in history and secrecy. Only the king and a few direct bloodlines of the royal family knew about the existence of this place.

It was vast, Its walls adorned with ancient tapestries whose colours had faded with time and depicting long-forgotten battles and rulers. The ceiling here was very high, and it felt like a crypt of the forgotten.

After walking for a while, Gladion reached the end of the stairwell and stood before an imposing set of obsidian doors, embellished with intricate etchings that seemed to come alive in the torchlight.

These doors too, held secrets, and as he pushed them open, they yielded with a faint creak, revealing the chamber beyond. The inside of the chamber was dimly lit and filling the space was an assortment of items and artefacts.

Scrolls, each containing long-lost knowledge, were neatly stacked on shelves. Mana stones, their ethereal glow muted by the passage of time, were carefully organized in ornate containers.

The room housed treasures collected by the Kingdom of Blackthorn over centuries, some dating back to the very founding of the kingdom. Many of these items were heirlooms, passed down through generations of the royal family.

This underground chamber, unknown to most, served as the treasury of the Onyx Sovereigns. They were a testament to the enduring legacy of the royal lineage.

Gladion's heart swelled with pride as he looked at the mountains of treasures that lay before him. The collection of wealth here was a symbol of his kingdom's strength and prestige. Every kingdom in the land, particularly the powerful ones, boasted their own treasuries.

These were more than just storerooms filled with gold and gems; they were a reflection of the kingdom's might and influence. The sheer amount of wealth a kingdom could accumulate spoke volumes about its status on the world stage.

Amassing such treasures was no small feat. It required not only wealth but also resources, power, and a keen understanding of diplomacy and conquest. The fact that Blackthorn had amassed this wealth over centuries, collecting items of immeasurable value from far-reaching corners of the world, was a testament to its dominance.

## Chapter 749 749- [Shortcuts]

The value of these treasures extended beyond their material worth. They represented the culmination of centuries of rule, the achievements of his ancestors, and the strength of his nation.

With each passing generation, the Onyx Sovereigns had added to this collection, solidifying their position as one of the most formidable kingdoms around the northwestern region.

Gladion's eyes did not stay put on the treasures for long and quickly shifted towards a figure at the far end of the chamber.

Cloaked in a dark robe, the figure sat in silence amidst the mountains of treasures. The details of their appearance remained shrouded in mystery. Their presence exuded an ancient aura and undeniable power, a force that was palpable even from a distance.

What was most striking about this figure was the unusual hue of their hands—a strange, ghostly grey that seemed to pulse with an otherworldly energy. Their hands moved with a fluid grace, and from them, a greyish-black energy emanated, weaving intricate patterns in the air.

This energy flowed from the figure's fingertips, extending to the items suspended before them and painting them an eerie grey colour.

The figure continued with its activity and one by one, all the relics and items suspended in front of the figure was changed into a greyish black colour.

What kind of ritual was that? What was the figure doing with all these items? The exact nature of this ritual was only known by Gladion and the figure presiding over it.

"Your Lordship... things are going according to plan. With Ellesmere as the starting point, in a couple of decades, Blackthorn will be ruling the entire northwester region" Gladion got on his knees and reported respectfully.

For him, a ruler of the kingdom and the highest authority in this place to kneel down to someone, one could imagine what kind of status the mysterious figure possessed.

"Ghgkgjkhjn... this speed is not enough. Faster... we need to be faster"

The mysterious figure opened by speaking some gibberish words before attuning their voice to speak words that made sense.

"This subordinate will do everything in his power. I just wanted to ask when will the next batch of those weapons be ready and when will your lordship regain all their power's back"...

"Ghghjjghh... the weapons will be ready soon. As for my powers, I will soon regain them. At that time, all the critters running around and soiling this world, will be wiped away. Of course, your Blackthorn will remain"

The voice of the mysterious figure was heavy and resentful. It gave one chill just by listening to it.

"Understood, many thanks to your lordship" Gladion deeply bowed his head, stored away the items that had been reconsecrated before turning around to leave.

'Oman you think you can look down on my Blackthorn just because your Kingdom of Ingolf is a Second Grade country? Hmph, just you wait, in the grand plans of his lordship you all are nothing but mere ants with only one end, and that is destruction. My kingdom of Blackthorn who has already allied with his lordship, has already scored its future' Gladion thought internally on his way to the exit. -----

Forbidden Grounds, Sixth trial.

Simon landed on the vast snowy expanse and released a deep breath of relief. Thankfully, the fracture in the River of Destiny did not teleport him to some random place and sent him back from where he came from.

Simon took a few seconds to compose his mind and organise his thoughts. He had survived falling into the river of destiny, the Yin Yang Koi Fish guided him to exit, his enemy Godwin had died, and he even managed to activate the second authority of his fragments of pride.

One could say that the trip to the River of Destiny although very short, was a very eventful one.

"It looks like I was stranded very far away from the place where we fought"

Finished organising his thoughts, Simon remarked observing his surroundings. Currently, he was in a vast snow covered plains. Everywhere he laid his eyes on, he could only see the endless falling snow and the arctic clouds above.

There were no signs of any mountains to be seen even at the distant horizons. If he wanted to complete the trail, he needed to find the location of the Abomination which was beyond the vast snowy mountain range.

Fortunately, he remembered that he got a notification from the Forbidden Grounds saying that the trial was halted right before he and Godwin was sucked into the unknown domain. That is to say, all the progress he made during this time in the trial was not lost.



"It doesn't look like the trial started yet. Could it be that it would only start once I reach the place where the Abomination was?"

Simon contemplated, he unfurled his wings and using the Harmony Stone he navigated his way back. Because the trial was in a suspended state, the falling snow did not suppress his level making it easier for him to fly freely.

After a while, the enormous mountain range appeared in his line of vision and beyond it was the battlefield where they fought Godwin and the Fourth Finger.

As soon as Simon appeared near a certain range of the battlefield, he felt as if he crossed some sort of barrier and time had started running once again. His hunch was soon proved right when he received a notification from the forbidden grounds saying that the Sixth Trial had been resumed.

GROOOOAARRR...

Simon heard a distant roar and arrived before the Abomination who was still bound by the chains and pillars. It appeared that even with Godwin gone, the seal he put on the Abomination was still active.

Though it was unknown how long it would stay like this, Simon needed to act fast. Since the Trial was halted, all the damage and exhaustion inflicted by Godwin on the Abomination, was still there. As such, he did not have to fight the Abomination all over again.

Anyway, although many unexpected occurrences appeared one after another in the way, Simon's main goal for coming here was always to clear the trial. Now with all the distractions gone, he could focus on his goal ahead and finish this trial at last.

GRAAAOOHHH... Simon looked at the growling Abomination in the distance and opened his Menu.

To deal with Godwin and the Fourth Finger, he had to use almost all of his trump cards. The Finger of Ozymandias needed time to recover all of its expended curse energy and the [Ancestral symbol Ignition] went into cooldown. He would not be able to use it again for a week.

This left only one other trick in his sleeve that held the power to bring down the Abomination in front of him. Simon's eyes slid toward the option on the bottom right corner of the Main Menu, right above the [Setting] option.

The option [Shortcuts] which had been inaccessible to him ever since he reincarnated on this world, had become accessible to him once again after the dungeon reached the intermediate rank.

He had working on this trump card of his for more than ten months now and finally, the time to unleash its might has come. Simon extended his fingers and tapped on the option. At that very instant a magnificent and ominous phenomenon occurred.

The light in the surroundings took on a golden black hue and a terrible fluctuation spread through dozens of kilometres of land. Before Simon could perceive it, a towering, flaming conflagration appeared above his head, its fierce golden flames flickering with an otherworldly luminance.

This blazing inferno extended high above Simon, a titanic fireball that dwarfed him in comparison. Within this colossal sphere of golden fire, a sinister black energy swirled at its heart, resembling like the eye of a malevolent demon.

The darkness within pulsed and writhed, like the maleficent gaze that gave one chill just by glancing at it.

The fireball's size was nothing short of awe-inspiring, its sheer magnitude enough to distort the very space and leave scorching marks in its fabric.

As it hovered menacingly above Simon, it seemed as though it could consume the very essence of existence itself.

"Amalgamation Magic- [Dark Infernal Blaze]"

Simon muttered inside his heart. The colossal ball of conflagration that appeared out of nowhere, was none other than the Amalgamation magic that was cast and stored by Simon inside the [Shortcuts] option.

It was a magic that was a result of combining two different attributes of magic, the advanced tier Infernal Magic and the Novice Dark Magic and possessed an extremely destructive might.

The option [Shortcuts], was once just a simple feature of a virtual game; however, after crossing worlds, it transcended its digital boundaries and evolved into a formidable asset for Simon.

In the realm of the game, it was a revered and coveted option, a gift that allowed the players to exceed the constraints of time and ability. An option that was a manifestation of convenience and tactical brilliance which allowed the players to deposit their most frequently used skills, incantations, or abilities within the slots of this option.

Thus allowing them to access the said skill or abilities from the [Shortcuts] instantaneously and without any delay.

Using this option, the players could transcend the typical casting or activation time and use the fraction of a second's advantage that often proved the decisive factor in a heated battle.

The activation of the [Shortcuts] option presented the user with an otherworldly interface, resembling a vault filled with slots. Here, they could deposit, categorize, and organize their chosen abilities. Each skill or ability had a designated slot within this extra dimensional repository.

#### Chapter 750 750- [Dark Infernal Blaze]

However, as the Main Menu transmigrated with Simon to a new world, the [Shortcuts] option went a transformation of its own. Although its essence remained the same, its operation became more enigmatic.

The option became the bridge that gapped the possible with the impossible, a gateway to harnessing the extraordinary at a moment's notice.

The [Shortcut] option much like all the other options of the Main Menu, was no longer bound by the game's mechanics, and its interface had evolved into a canvas of infinite potential. It was as though it had adapted to the new world's rules, blending seamlessly with the fabric of reality.

It now harboured an extraordinary space within it, a mystical vault where Simon could store all of his skills, abilities, and magic. However, this wasn't just any storage; it was a place beyond the boundaries of conventional reality.

Within this ethereal expanse, the laws of the world were suspended, and time itself lay in a perpetual stasis. Every skill, spell, or ability he stored remained frozen in a pristine state. There were no diminishing returns, no cooldown periods, and no traces of wear and tear on his powers.

It was as if the moment they entered this space, they existed outside the confines of causality and entropy.

In the world of Althaea, casting a spell or using an ability required a constant flow of mana to sustain it, and the magic gradually deteriorated over time. However, within the sanctuary of [Shortcut], such laws held no sway.

Every enchantment, every incantation, and every ability was preserved in its purest form, as if time had stopped. It was a domain where the effects of any action didn't fade away, where each spell remained as potent as the day it was first cast.

The Amalgamation magic- [Dark Infernal Blaze] was one of the magic that was stored inside the [Shortcuts]. And since it was already cast, Simon just had to tap on the option and the skill and magic would manifest in front of him with just a will.

What's more, it was an instant invocation, he did not need to sift through the vault and go through each and every skill assigned there. Instead, all it needed was just a thought from him and the said magic would manifest, given that it was already stored inside the [Shortcuts].

This was the most remarkable thing about the option, the instant invocation. In the heat of a moment, when every second counted, Simon could tap into the repository of powers and bend time to his advantage.

Abilities that would typically require lengthy incantations or preparations could be summoned in an instant. Right now, Simon only had a few a magic stored inside the enigmatic space of the option but with time as he grew stronger and his magic progressed, he would be able to store more and more magic inside [Shortcuts].

He was right when he thought that this option could become another one of his trump cards. Simon glanced at the huge fireball above him and came to the realisation.

This was the first time he was putting the option into practice and since the magic was no longer held down by the laws of the option that sealed it in a state of stasis, it could detonate any second.

As such, time was of essence here. With each passing second, the magic's instability increased. The golden flames clashed violently with the dark magic, creating an unpredictable and dangerous situation.

Given how the magic was unable to keep its shape any longer, it was clear that the two attributes repelled each other and would soon erupt in a violent eruption.

Simon willed the flaming conflagration downward, directing it toward the sealed Abomination. The creature sensed the imminent danger and emitted a deep, ominous growl that resonated through the area.

Simon did not stay put to marvel at the might of his magic, instead, he turned around and fled using all of his might. The reason for that was simple, the Amalgamation Magic- [Dark Infernal Blaze] was not a complete magic, the two attributes were still far from achieving harmony and still repelled each other.

The volatile energy that had been building inside the magic had reached its peak and could no longer be contained. What's more, Simon had been training and tempering with the magic in the past few months, supplying it with all of his mana every day.

The magic which was the size of a football when it was still inside the [Shortcuts], had grown up to a colossal size in just a fraction of a second when it was brought out. Given all this, one could understand how powerful the explosion would be.

There was no need to even think further, Simon turned around and fled with all of his might, the beat of his wings and the tearing noise of winds echoed in the eerie silence of the desolate snowlands.

And then it happened.

The moment the magic came into contact with the sealed Abomination, chaos erupted. The opposing forces of infernal flames and dark arcane energies clashed violently, creating a cataclysmic explosion of blinding brilliance.

The shockwave swept through the land with devastating force, annihilating everything in its path. In the wake of the cataclysmic explosion, the world seemed to shudder and convulse.

A shockwave, a monstrous wall of force, surged outward from the epicentre, distorting the very air it touched. The land itself quivered, as if protesting the violence inflicted upon it.

That was not all, as the violent clash of infernal flames and dark arcane energy reached its peak, the very ground beneath them seemed to liquefy, and then erupt in a titanic upheaval. The once-sturdy landscape crumbled like brittle parchment, sending colossal plumes of dust and debris billowing into the heavens.

The brilliant light, an amalgamation of golden flames and dark magic, blossomed into an awe-inspiring spectacle. It painted the sky in an iridescent tapestry of colours that no artist's palette could hope to replicate.

The very fabric of space strained and buckled under the immense pressure, creating rifts that pulsed with unnatural energy.

Simultaneously, the shockwave roared outward, a tsunami of pure devastation. Mountains crumbled into cascading avalanches of ice and rock. Snow, rocks, and the very earth itself were swept away like leaves in a tempest.

The previously pristine, untouched terrain was marred by deep chasms that fractured the earth. The unfortunate creatures caught in its path had no chance of escape; they were reduced to ashes in an instant.

The shockwave, an unstoppable force of devastation, coursed through the snowy expanse with unrelenting fury. It hit Simon who was already tens of kilometres away, causing him to take a brutal tumble down to the ground.

All the snow that was swirled into the atmosphere above, rained down at him, burying him underneath.

.

.

After a while, as the rumbling of the ground stopped and the aftereffects of the magic settled down a bit, Simon tunnelled himself out through the snow. Blood oozed out of his body and there were severe burns marring his skin. Some of his hair too got burnt in that heatwave.

Thankfully, much of the power and force of the shockwave had been neutralised, all the injuries he suffered were just superficial and would be healed soon after by his recovery skills.

"This..." Simon stood amidst the desolation, his heart heavy with a sense of awe and trepidation. Everywhere his eyes roamed, they encountered nothing but the aftermath of sheer devastation.

The brilliant display of golden flames and dark magic had scarred the very fabric of space itself, leaving it looking fragile and stretched to its limits. Unnatural rifts and tears, like jagged scars in the world, pulsed with an eerie and otherworldly energy, stubborn remnants of the explosive power that had torn through this once-pristine realm.

Mountains, once towering symbols of stability and endurance, now lay in shattered ruins, their once-mighty peaks reduced to rubble that choked the ground.

Simon couldn't help but be overcome by a profound mixture of emotions. Awe, for he had wielded power on a scale beyond his wildest imagination. Trepidation, for he now understood the terrible potential of this newfound magic.

In this moment of reflection, he shivered at the realization that if he had tested this devastating magic within the confines of his carefully constructed dungeon, the consequences could have been catastrophic.

The very thought of such wanton destruction taking place within the heart of his home sent a chill down his spine.

Simon understood more than ever, the weight of the power he held in his hands. It was not a force that should be wielded by a Demon Earl, that kind of power could even kill some low levelled Demon Dukes.

What kind of concept was killing a Demon Duke with a single attack?

It needs to be mentioned that in this current era, with the Demon Archdukes taking a back seat, a Demon Duke was basically the uncontested ruler of the Demonic Continent.

Whether it be their power, the legions they commanded or their influence, no other demons could match it. They were like the absolute beings of the demon continent in the current era.

Even putting everything else aside, just the fact that they were beings who had stepped into the level 700 realm spoke volumes about them. It was a common knowledge amongst the beings of this world that once one enters level 700, it becomes incredibly hard to kill them.

Not only do they possess multiple high ranking regenerative skills, but they can even manipulate the mana in the surroundings to restore their expanded mana thus allowing them to keep on fighting.