

D. of Pride 791

Chapter 791 791- [Custodian] of the Floor Zero

"It's weird seeing him so psyched up right after suffering those life threatening injuries. If it was me, I would need weeks or even months to get over that experience" Wyot added teasingly as he drank the ale from his mug.

"This is not a laughing matter Wyot, Blake almost died" Frida reproved "You should listen to me and get some more rest"...

"What do you mean, there is such a good party going over here. You want me to miss this?" Blake continued gobbling one food after another as if making up for all the nutrients his body lost during the previous fight.

"Haha, well said Blake, as adventurers how can we miss a banquet? Today let us drink and eat to our heart's content" Wyot raised his glass for toast.

"Sigh, these people" Sighing inwardly, Frida turned towards Cynthia and asked, "Your Highness as you can see they are like this and full of energy. I don't think they are gonna stop anytime soon. Anyways, where is that little girl? She saved Blake, I never properly thanked her".

After healing Blake, it was as if she had disappeared, she was nowhere to be found in the tower town.

"You mean Miss Maybell? She is somewhere around here, but since she doesn't like parties like this, I doubt you will find her inside" Cynthia answered "You can thank her when you meet her again"...

TREMBLE...

Just as she finished her words, the ground started trembling intensely. The shocks were so violent that the entire building creaked with small cracks appearing around the walls.

"Another earthquake? What is going on with the Tower Town? Don't tell me it's another catastrophe class monster?!!"...

"You idiot how can there be another catastrophe class monster? do you think monsters of such anomalous power grow on trees? If there was another one, wouldn't the town be destroyed already?"...

"Look outside, it's not an earthquake, the shocks are coming from the tower"...

At this moment, if one bobbed their head outside the window, they would be able to witness a phenomenal scene that an average human would be incapable of witnessing in their entire lifetime. A spectacle that defied the boundaries of the ordinary.

Outside, a colossal column of mystical energy surged from the very depths of the tower. It rose with an otherworldly brilliance, racing toward the heavens.

The mystical energy carried an ethereal glow, creating an aurora effect that painted the sky with brilliant colours. The sheer magnitude of this magical display left onlookers breathless, the ordinary facade of their town transformed into a realm of wonder.

It was a moment that transcended the mundane, an event that etched itself into the collective memory of the tower town, making them unable to forget it in their lifetime.

"Woah, what the hell, it's beautiful... but it's coming from the tower" A few people pointed at the distant tower, confused by the new event.

"Ah!! I remember now, I witnessed it before too. Though this time, the scale is on a whole another level" One of the adventurers inside the association muttered remembering something.

"What do you mean you witnessed it before? Is something like that normal here? Tell us what you know?"

On the insistence of the other adventurers, the man who opened his mouth earlier, explained.

"Everyone, calm down, this phenomenon has occurred in the tower town before too. It's nothing serious"...

"How can you say that after all the things that happened recently?"...

"It's because nothing happened the last time too. From what we have investigated at that time, we came to the conclusion that it is a phenomenon that occurs when a dungeon ranks up".

This was not the first time that something like this had occurred in the tower town, people who were the denizens of the town since way back had already witnessed such a scene before.

Nevertheless, that is not important right now.

"Did you just this phenomenon was the indication of the dungeon ranking up?" Blake walked out from amidst the crowd and questioned the man.

Seeing that it was one of the heroes who saved the town who asked the question, the man became a little nervous. However, he still replied honestly.

"Oi.. Oi... wait a second there, didn't you say that you witnessed a similar scene before too? Are you saying that in just the span of a few years, the dungeon ranked up twice?!!"

It was only after Wyot pointed it out, did the adventurers finally realised the seriousness of the matter. It was commonly known that a dungeon requires dozens if not hundreds of years to increase in rank.

It was not just the matter of climbing up an alphabet, the evolution of a dungeon was a slow and arduous process that required a vast accumulation of mystical energy, various esoteric conditions and a long gruelling period of time.

Even the Adventurer's Association was unaware of the exact conditions needed for a dungeon to rank up. Nevertheless, what was known was that the conditions were extremely rough and usually require a long period of time.

The higher the rank of the dungeon, the more true the case was. It was for this reason that many low ranking dungeons gets conquered before they even have the chance to become an intermediate ranking one.

But this... the Dungeon Laplace not only deviated from all the norms but was even ranking up at a speed that was utterly ridiculous to say no less.

"Isn't dungeon Laplace already a [C] rank intermediate tier dungeon? Since it's going through an increase in rank, doesn't it mean that it is about to become a [B] rank" Blake commented, staring at the tower and the dungeon underneath with solemn eyes.

At the mention of [B] rank, the entire hall became silent. What did it mean for a dungeon to be ranked as such? A [B] ranking dungeon, even if one searched the entire Demon Continent, one wouldn't find that many dungeons that have actually reached that rank.

Once a dungeon becomes a [B] ranking dungeon, it means that it has reached the peak of the intermediate tier and has become a force in the world that couldn't be ignored. Not only it marked a significant increase in challenge and opportunity for adventurers, it also signified the increase in strength, complexity and dangers of the trials in the dungeon.

Even though [B] rank still falls in the category of the intermediate tier, there was a vast difference between a [B] and [C] ranking dungeon.

The monsters within a [B]-rank dungeon are notably stronger and more cunning. Their abilities are more diverse, requiring adventurers to adapt and strategize their tactics effectively.

The traps and puzzles within such a dungeon are more intricate, demanding a higher level of intellect and skill to navigate. Not only that, [B]-rank dungeons are known to house more valuable treasures, rare artifacts, and magical items. The risks are greater, but so are the potential rewards.

It may also contain unique resources or materials that are highly sought after in the wider world like Mythril, Adamantium and such.

Adventurers, who can successfully stir through the trails of a [B] ranking dungeon and clear floors gain a reputation that surpasses those who have only faced lower-ranked challenges. It's a testament to their growing prowess.

The clearance of floors of such dungeons becomes a rite of passage for many aspiring adventurers, a mark that they are ready to face the tougher realms.

Then there was the factor of environment and size. [B]-rank dungeons often exhibit a broader range of environments, from expansive caverns to enchanted forests within their confines.

This diversity challenges adventurers to adapt to various terrains and conditions. The size of each floors are also many times larger, causing adventurers to explore deeper and uncover hidden secrets. This expansion of territory makes mapping and navigation more complex.

Talking about advanced magical phenomena, starting from [B] rank, dungeons show magical anomalies such as temporal distortions elemental anomalies, or zones with heightened magical influences, distortions that were absent in [C] and lower ranking dungeons.

That was not all, [B] ranking dungeon was said to be the gateway to lure Rankers. It was generally known that Rankers usually dive in dungeons [B] rank or above as the lower ranking dungeon did not have much appeal or challenge for them.

Now that the Dungeon of the Tower Town has become a [B] rank, soon this place would start attracting more and more rankers.

Laplace will have more political significance in the wider world with kingdoms and factions vying for control or seek alliances to harness the dungeon's resources.

Whatever the case was, everybody was certain about one thing, the tower town was going to see some significant change in the coming months.

"I guess I can't allow myself to get left behind" Blake clenched his hands in resolve.

As surprising as the event might seem, he had already known that the Dungeon Laplace wasn't ordinary. Even when it was a low ranking dungeon, it displayed the propensities and characteristics of higher ranks.

Thinking that way, it was easier for Blake to accept the improbable notion that the dungeon was increasing in rank at an utterly baffling speed. In any case, he was an adventurer. His blood boiled in excitement just thinking about the trials and challenges lying in wait in the dungeon.

While the adventurers were looking at the tower with all kinds of dumbfounded expressions, Cynthia's attention was distracted by something else. Her eyes were blank as she dazedly looked at the space.

In front of her, appeared a screen that she had never encountered before.

Chapter 792 792- [Custodian] Of The Floor Zero (2)

Written on the screen was a few words.

[You have been appointed the Custodian of the Shadowed Tower. Floor Zero now covers the whole town. You are now able to control the entire area]...

"Custodian of the Shadowed Tower" Cynthia muttered reading the notification that popped up in front of her as soon as the phenomenon outside occurred.

"Congratulations, Your Highness. Now you are a part of the dungeon and lord Simon's entourage"

Before she could think further, Annette from the sides congratulated her. At that instant, she understood that it was the doing of 'that' guy.

"Did Si... Lord Simon did this?"...

"That is correct. Now that the dungeon has increased in rank, the tower town has now become a part of the tower or otherwise known as Floor Zero. Master appointed you as the Custodian of this floor, a rank that is only one tier lower than us Administrators"

"With this authority, you can control everything and anything on this floor, set up any rules, and installations from the [Shop], change the topography or even teleport the whole town inside the tower. In short, you have become the person in charge of the tower. As long as you are inside the field zero, you are able to access the [Main Menu]"

Annette explained. As one of the Administrators of the dungeon, she also got the notification of Cynthia's appointment as the Custodian. She had long figured out that the latter would play a larger role in her master's plan than just being a figurehead who governed the tower town on their behalf.

Now with her appointed as the Custodian, she was clear.

'Could it be that the objective of her master isn't just to bring the tower town under his influence, but the entire...' Annette couldn't help but give Cynthia another look over.

A well known figure, a princess and a royal with multiple connections and influence over the masses. Thanks to the recent event, she even became the Mayor of the town and now commands an army of adventurers, merchants and other people of various professions who would do anything on her behalf for freeing them.

With such a huge force at her disposal, it was clear what Cynthia's objective was. Reclaiming her kingdom back which has been forcefully occupied by the Kingdom of Blackthorn.

The princess who had once lost everything and had to take refuge under their master, was now the leader of all these strong men and women. Even though she was right next to her and witnessed all of this happening, Annette still couldn't believe her eyes.

In just a little over a week, she gained a force that wasn't inferior to the army of any kingdom and is now preparing to take her kingdom back.

'Did Master foresee this development?' She couldn't help but wonder. If her master had planned all of this from the start, then didn't it mean that he was an expert strategist?

At this moment, Simon's image inside Annette's heart, became even more reverential.

Though all of it was her own misconception. It was true that Simon had a much bigger plan for Cynthia than just to become a figurehead for the tower town. For this purpose, he sent Annette and the others to support her.

In fact, he didn't think that his plan would go as smoothly as it did. Making her the leader of Tower Town that everybody recognised and letting her take control of the floor zero was the extent of his plan.

Gaining a force that followed her every will was something that even he hadn't predicted and was something that was the result of the consequences of Mars' intervention and Cynthia's own efforts.

In short, Simon hadn't foreseen any of this, it was all a big misconception on Annette's part.

The spectacle outside went on for one full day and after people realised that nothing unusual was happening and it was simply a sign of the dungeon ranking up, they went on with their activities.

The next day around noon, Cynthia gathered all the adventurer leaders and influential people of the tower town in the Serene Palace Merchant Guild building to discuss her next set of actions.

When she finally confessed what she was after and looked at the casual expression of the people around her, she couldn't help but ask.

"Aren't you guys surprised? Everything that I did, all my actions up until now was just to regain my kingdom back".

She expected the people to be surprised or dismayed even after hearing her objective. However, to her confusion, they showed none of those expressions and kept a straight face as if everything she was saying was all a common knowledge and nothing too unexpected.

"Haha, what are you even saying Your Highness? We already knew what you were after since the beginning. You are the sole princess of the kingdom of Ellesmere and one of the royal bloodline. Of course you would want to regain your kingdom; no, our kingdom back"

The first one to speak was Wyot who had become one of her most loyal subordinates after the recent events. Although he was not from the kingdom, he still called it as our, showing that he would absolutely support Cynthia no matter what decision she made.

"That's right princess, you are the princess of the kingdom. As one of its royal, it is only natural for you to fight the enemies of your kingdom. I don't like Blackthorn anyways, it is because of them that the tower town became the way it was"

Another supported. Following him, more and more people started showing their willingness to fight for her.

"Your Highness, although I'm not much use in a war, but my merchant crew will support you with all our strength. You can use our resources and networks as you wish"...

"You Highness, it is thanks to the heroes you sent that my wife and children are alive. I will fight for you. I run a weapon store chain in the Kingdom of Peria. Leave the supply of weapons and other materials to us".

Seeing all the people support her without asking any questions, Cynthia realised that she had underestimated her efforts and how much influence it had on the people of the tower town.

She had not only saved them, but she arrived at the time when they were at their lowest and needed her the most. She boosted their morals and showed them hope. Not only that, but the heroes that followed her made them believe that she could defeat any opponent.

The whole town had witnessed that epic battle where her heroes repelled the catastrophe back inside the dungeon. The figure of their valiant fight had already burned itself in their consciousness and cannot be changed easily.

Because of this misconception, none of the people here had any fear of going to a war against a nation.

People like them constituted the majority, the rest were of course, profit seekers and money grubbers. They were supporting her only for the sake of benefits. After all, where there was war, there was tons of money rolling in.

Not to mention if they supported her and she became the queen later on, they would be obtaining much more benefit for supporting her.

And just like that, the worst fear Cynthia had, disappeared just like that.

"Well even if it wasn't your objective we would have to go to war with Blackthorn sooner or later anyway. With the spread of the news of the dungeon in the tower town becoming a [B] rank, it is just a matter of time before the other kingdoms come attacking us to occupy the dungeon. The political significance of a [B] rank dungeon is unimaginable. Nations would do anything to take control and harness the dungeon's resources"

Blake rationally reasoned putting another reason there for them to fight for Cynthia. And thus, the topic shifted from why they needed to go to a war to when should they take this war.

Going on a large scale battle with a nation as powerful as Blackthorn required a lot of preparations and time. They not only needed multiple discussion sessions to set up plans and tactics they also needed to control the flow of information so that none of the plan leaked to the enemy.

Naturally, discussing all that, ate up a lot of time. After the session of discussion for today was over, Cynthia dismissed everyone and leaned back in her seat.

"Good work Your Highness" The only one who was allowed to stay back, was Annette. Even Alvara had to excuse herself. She came to Cynthia's side and gently offered her a glass of cold water.

"Thank you, it's because of all of your aid that I was able to make it this far"...

"You are wrong in that thinking, Your Highness" Annette shook her head "Although we did aid you, this development is because of your efforts and life's work. We had nothing to do with it".

"Is that so? Anyways, what did lord Simon say? Are there any new orders?" Cynthia asked.

"There are none. He only told us to aid you in every way to reclaim the kingdom back".

As a royal and as the mistress of the Serene Palace Merchant Guild, she had seen many people and instances in her life where they said things they did not mean. As a result, she had to learn reading between the lines and guess their objective through their body language and the subtle hints they dropped subconsciously.

However, no matter how she looked at Annette, she couldn't tell what the other party was thinking at all.

Chapter 793 793- Raid on Castledor

Whether it be her body language or disposition, it was seemingly perfect with not even a single flaw to be found. This on the contrary was very frightening as there was no way of knowing what she was actually thinking.

"I see in that case, we shall go forward with the plan we made" Cynthia could only believe in the demon and that he meant every word he said. In any case, she who has formed a soul contract with the demon, it was already too late for her to turn around.

.

.

Dukedom of Montford, Castledor city...

Inside the Castle Montford, Alstin Elrand Ellesmere, the first prince of the Kingdom of Ellesmere could be seen sitting around a table discussing matters of importance with his retainers.

The once handsome prince who could make all the girls in the kingdom smitten to him with just his looks, at this moment looked extremely haggard and weary.

There were dark circles around his eyes, indicating that he was sleep deprived, his face looked sunken causing his cheekbones to pop out and his once long hair had thinned out to the point where one could see his hairline receding.

The contrast was so much that, if one hadn't seen the first prince for a while, they would have difficulty believing that it was him.

The contrast was so much that, if one hadn't seen the first prince for a while, they would have difficulty believing that it was him.

In just a couple of months, he had changed drastically. However, his change wasn't the result of him being ill or anything, it was because of all the pressure and stress that he looked the way he did right now.

"Alright everyone, dismiss. Keep an eye on the movement of the enemies and notify me as soon as the spies send their reports".

At his command, the people got up and left the room.

"Dammit, each and every one of them is useless. They can't even do a single fucking thing I tell them to" Alstin cursed violently scratching his head.

"Ahh noo!! My hair they are falling again. This is all because of him, if only he hadn't brought foreign aid with him, our kingdom wouldn't have fallen in their hands"

The one he was cussing and swearing at, was none other than his brother, the second prince of the kingdom. If not for his brother fighting him over the throne and bringing those foreign invaders, he would have already become the king and their country wouldn't have fallen so easily.

"Dammit, why can't anything go the way I want"

BANG... He kicked a chair that smashed onto the nearby wall.

"Calm your anger down Your Highness" The room that seemed empty, wasn't actually empty. There was one man who was sitting on the couch, casually drinking his tea who was yet to leave the room.

The man had a handsome face with a well groomed hairstyle that reached till his shoulders and lurid red hair. He was wearing a gaudy red robe that was made of some high class material and tailored to complement his noble aura and handsome looks.

On his side, he carried a staff that had a large core stone, as big as a human skull, embedded on its top. Obviously, the staff was of a very high rank and pulsed with a dense amount of mana.

The man had a scholarly look and was calmly reading a book. No matter how you look at him, the man was a mage through and through. However, he wasn't just any mage but a renowned genius of the kingdom who surpassed all records and became the first person to step on level 500 at such an early age.

The man was none other than Lucas Blackwood, the chosen successor of Duke Montford and a powerful fire mage in his own right.

"How can I calm down in a situation like this Lucas? Everything is falling apart in front of my eyes. Have you not heard the report? The eastern and southern regions of the kingdom have bowed their head and surrendered to the Blackthorn and are now completely under the control"

"Those ingrateful traitors have they forsaken their pride and dignity? I'll chop every one of their heads once I become the king"

Alstin slammed his fist on the table in rage. Just the thought of those bastards who didn't hesitate to change sides the moment the capital fell and things looked dire for them, made him sick.

Suddenly as if remembering something, his face brightened up for a second as he asked "It has been more than a month, did those people send any message back?"

The mysterious aid who he was clutching onto was a powerful underground organisation that operated in the shadows of the Mainland. They were a powerful and mysterious group who have many powerful fighters on their side.

Before gaining Lucas and the Duke's support, he had been getting aid from them. However, for some reason a few years ago, they completely stopped all communication or business with him.

He had been trying to reestablish a connection with them ever since then. If he could gain their aid again he could turn the situation around in one go.

That was how powerful that underground organisation was.

However, to his disappointment, Lucas shook his head saying "They are yet to send a reply. It doesn't look like the money Your Highness sent to them was able to persuade their minds".

"kugh... then what should I do Lucas? I sent them all the treasures there were in the treasury of our kingdom. If even that isn't enough to bring the Cerberus to our side, then I don't know what will."...

"Maybe the Cerberus doesn't see any benefit in saving the kingdom that is why they holding onto giving a reply. Or it could be that they are helping the enemies instead" Lucas speculated flipping the page of his book.

"Watch what you say Lucas, even if it's you, I won't forgive blasphemy towards the kingdom. Besides, I don't understand why you are not at all concerned. You a noble of this kingdom and the chosen heir to Duke Montford. If the kingdom goes down, it would affect your status too"

As Alstin had mentioned, Lucas looked all relaxed and calm as he flipped through the pages of his book. Even though the kingdom was on its last leg and almost about to be occupied by Blackthorn, one cannot see even a trace of anxiousness or panic on his face far from it, he looked like everything that was happening, had nothing to do with him.

"Haha, Your Highness you misunderstand. Of course, the fall or survival of the kingdom affects me too. However, what good would it do if I started panicking too? If the both of us get paralysed by

anxiety, then we won't be able to make any sound decisions. It is for this reason that I am diverting my mind by reading a book"

Lucas answered while still looking at the book.

"I see... you are right. Both of us cannot panic, one of us has to stay composed to respond to the worsening situation.."

As Alstin was muttering that, he suddenly noticed the book Lucas was reading starting to glow and disappear into thin air.

"Huh?!! Where did that book of yours go? Did it just disappear into light particles?".

"Haha, don't worry too much about it, it's just a trick book" Brushing aside the question, Lucas now free from his activity, walked out to the balcony and picked up a different topic.

"By the way Your Highness, while your subordinates were giving their reports, I couldn't help but overhear an interesting matter"..

"What do you mean?"...

"You know, how there are reports coming in regarding Princess Cytnhia and how she may be still alive"...

"What?!" The expression on Alstin's face changed for a second but he quickly covered that before it could be noticed.

"Hmph, those are all nonsense. Don't tell me Lucas you believe those reports? I told you she died in an accident when the army of Blackthorn invaded our capital. How can she still be alive much less be in that remote region of a place?".

Lucas was silent, his clear eyes observed Alstin and although there was a smile on his face, it by no means a smile that gave others a sense of ease.

"It's not that I don't believe you your highness, it just that I wonder if you still remember the agreement we had"...

"I know, my sister the princess of the kingdom was supposed be betroed to you in return for your and the Duke's aid. However, how is it my fault that she died in that incident?"

"I tried to do everything in my power to bring you two together. Trust me, nothing else would have made me happier to see my sister with a genius with a great future like you"

While outwardly Alstin said all that with a clear conscience on his face, he was inwardly making an extremely ugly expression. It was a lie that his sister died in the incident where the capital was invaded.

The truth was that his sister was against this political marriage and fiercely resisted his decision.

To make things worse, that foolish father of his even tried to make Cynthia his heir. He already had his hands full fighting the faction of second brother as such, he couldn't be lenient to her even if she was his sister.

Therefore to keep his promise to Lucas and make Cynthia bow out from the power struggle, he tried to capture her by sending people after her.

Who would have known that stupid sister of his would rather dive inside the dungeon than surrender. His plan to build a solid relationship with Lucas and Duke Montford was ruined because of her.

Chapter 794 794- Raid On Castledor (2)

No, to begin with, it was all her fault. If not for her being so exceptional as to build her own merchant guild and threaten his position all these years, he could have grown his faction much bigger than what it was now.

'If only she had died in that forest all those years ago, I wouldn't have fallen out of grace like this' Alstin cursed inwardly.

A couple of years ago when he found an excuse to send his sister to the remote city of Moutnmend, he had planned to get rid of her than by sending assassins.

Jeeves who was working for him in the shadows, reported her every action to him. However, to his dismay, not only did she return alive from the trip, he lost his important pawn and the Cerberus broke all ties with him ever since then.

To make matters worse, now there were even rumours going on about her being alive. Even after death, she was making things difficult for him. As much as he hated her for ruining his plans, he couldn't say all that to Lucas.

"I see then isn't it a good thing? If Princess Cynthia is really alive, she can finally be with me"...

"Haha... right. It is as you said, if the news is really true, then nothing will make me happy to see you together"

While he said that out front, inwardly he was (You fucking obsessive bastard, if not because I need your aid right now, I would have sent you to the gallows. It's disgusting how much you can get infatuated over someone).

He had known Lucas long enough to know all of his disgusting behaviours. His sister had never shown any interest towards this guy, it was all in his head that she liked him.

.

.

City of Mountmend... Sitting atop a mountain, the city was not like what it was before. Although not wealthy, the city was once filled with vibrant people and full of life. However, after the capital fell, injured soldiers and people who had lost everything flooded the surrounding regions.

The city of Mountment was no exception, homeless and destitute people crowded the streets of the city. With nowhere else to go, they could only rely on the cities who have yet to fall.

Count Alfred Eude Bergest who was one of the few royals who actually cared about his populace, didn't have the heart to send all of these people away. He did everything he could to help them.

However, things turned for the worse again after the tower town was taken over by some kind of shady organisations and all trade and network was cut off.

The city which primarily lived with its trade from the monster parts and merchants that came from the tower town, suddenly lost its source of income. In a situation like this, the condition of the city went from bad to worse.

With no supply of food and the threat of looming war, even the average population of the city had nothing to eat. Much less needs to be said for those homeless people.

Piles of bodies lay on the ground, unknown whether they were alive or not. The city was not only surrounded by a dark atmosphere, it even gave off a bad stench.

On this day, an unusual group of people visited the city. Alfred who rarely dressed in his noble attire, did so for this occasion and came out of his manor to invite the guests in.

Usually, he gave this job to his butler or maids; however, the identity of this guest was simply too special to delegate to his subordinates. Thus, the count came out personally to invite them in.

The manor of Count Alfred wasn't an extravagant one, although it was called a manor, it wasn't in a too good of a condition.

The colours of the wall had lost their vibrancy, subdued by the war and tears of the season. Moss and wild vines hung tenaciously to the edges of the manor showing nature's claim over the place.

It was not only the exterior of the manor that saw its time, the interior of the manor was no different. Cobwebs adorned corners and archways, dimly lit halls with only lamps and other low quality lanterns to light the halls.

Forget about chandeliers, there was not even a piece of decoration that looked like it was worth something inside the manor. Everything and anything of value was sold off to run the city.

After Alfred brought them inside a hall used for entertaining guests, they sat on what looked like antiquated furnishings.

"Bring some tea and snacks for our guests" He ordered his few servants who still remained employed despite Alfred not being able to pay them their wages.

"It looks like you are not doing well for yourself, Alfred"

The guest sitting on the head seat spoke. To be able to call a count with their name, the guest's identity was at the very least equal or above theirs.

"Haha, it's as you say, your highness. However, compared to the people of the city, I am still living too well"

Alfred spoke looking at the woman in front of him with incredulous eyes. Why would he not? After all, the person sitting opposite to him was none other than the sole princess of Ellesmere who had supposedly died in the incident in the capital.

"You are being too humble. I haven't seen any noble who lives so modestly and cares so much for their populace. If I didn't know you, the thought that this was a house of a noble, wouldn't even cross my mind"

It was as she had said, most nobles usually lived a life of extravagance. It did not matter to them if their populace was dying of hunger or were unable to fend for themselves, their first and foremost interest was to safeguard their possession and wealth.

Which is why, seeing a noble like Alfred who sold off his possessions just to support the populace was such an oddity.

Cynthia and Alfred chattered on, reminiscing about the old times. Finally as if unable to keep it to himself, the count spoke.

"Your Highness... you are really alive!!" His tone was a mix of confirmation, disbelief, surprise and relief.

"That's right, I'm alive and well just as you can see"...

"Then all those reports about your death in the capital and that weird news about you appearing in the dungeon town?".

Knowing that the news of her being alive would surprise anyone, Cynthia explained her situation—

"The reports about me dying in the capital are false. I didn't die in the incident when the capital fell. On the contrary, I wasn't even there. I had run off from the capital to avoid being used as a political tool by my brothers. Running and constantly avoiding their pursuit, I arrived at the tower town. The news you received from people witnessing me in the dungeon town is true. I have been living there for the past few months"...

"You have been living in the dungeon town? Hasn't that place already been taken over by the criminal organisations? Don't tell me Your Highness that you were taken hostage by them?"

Hearing that Cynthia was living in the dangerous dungeon town, Alfred couldn't help but exclaim. He had sent several spies of his to assess the situation of the town which is why he knew that the town had been converted into a den of criminals after the takeover.

To have survived in that kind of condition, Alfred couldn't help but become impressed inwardly.

"The tower town you know about is no longer the same. In fact, one of my objectives behind coming here, was to let you know that the trade routes between Tower Town and Mountmend would reopen once again. Not only that, the custom duty on goods travelling to Mountmend would also be alleviated for a year. About the routes that connect the two towns, I was thinking about levying an excise tax on the carriages... "

Cynthia kept on talking about multiple topics causing the already confused Alfred to become even more baffled.

"Wait... wait a minute Your Highness. What do you mean by all this? What do you mean when you said that the tower town is no longer the same?"

"About that, let me fill in to the count" Alvara who was among the few people accompanying Cynthia, spoke.

She told Alfred about everything that happened in the tower town in the past few days. After the Count of Mountmend heard everything, he was stupefied for a good long while.

The content of the tales, from the start of the insurrection by the few revolters and how Her Highness and the others came to their rescue to how they took back the tower town from the hands of the criminal organisations was so thrilling that Alfred did not even have time to breathe in between the story.

He couldn't believe all that happened in the tower town and he got no report about it from his subordinates.

"I have blocked all communication going in and out of the town. Every person and transmission are strictly monitored so as to avoid leaking of any information. This is how I found out your subordinates are also inside the town. They tried to explain their reasoning; however, I still stopped them from reporting"

"As you can see, the tower town has just begun growing anew again and I don't want anyone to know about the place or what happened there yet".

So that was the reason, no wonder his subordinates didn't send any report back. It was because it was the princess who had sealed off the entire town.

Chapter 795 Raid On Castledor (3)

How in the hell did she block the communication of the entire town? No, in the first place, why is she even talking like she was speaking on behalf of the entire? It couldn't be...

"That's right, after a unanimous agreement, Her Highness was chosen as the governor of the tower town. She is now the ruler of the tower town".

Alfred expected something along that line happening after hearing that the princess and her subordinates freed the tower town. However, when it was really told out loud, it finally struck him how incredible of a task Cynthia had accomplished.

There was many a time when he thought about raiding the tower town himself wanting to change the condition of his city. Nevertheless, every time those impulsive thoughts arrived in his head, he would immediately suppress them.

After all, being a noble who was close to adventurers, he knew how powerful the adventurers were. To be able to suppress all those powerful men and women, the organisations ruling the tower town from the shadows, had to be even more capable and dangerous.

What Cynthia managed to achieve was something that Alfred was incapable of. She deserved to be the ruler of the tower town.

"Your Highness, you are truly amazing. With the reopening of the trade routes between the two cities, the city Mountmend would once again be able to fend for its people again. The influx of merchants and goods would make sure that the populace wouldn't have to go to sleep on an empty stomach. I cannot express my gratitude to you enough. Truly thank you"

Alfred bowed his head deeply to express his gratitude.

"Raise your head count Alfred. Reopening of the trade routes will benefit the two cities equally, as such there is no reason to keep it close. And besides, I'm thinking about levying a new excise tax"...

"I agree with all of that. As long as Her Highness keeps the trade route open, the city of Mountmend will be able to survive" Alfred agreed before Cynthia could even finish her piece.

"I see... however, Count Alfred you are the ruler of the city of Mountmend and the regions surrounding it. As a ruler who supports his populace, you cannot simply agree on all of the terms without even listening to all of them"

"But be that may, we can leave that to our retainers to concretize the finer details. As I told you earlier, I have multiple objectives for coming here. One of them is to see you, the Count of Mountmend and reopen the trade routes between the two cities. The other is to find out something for myself"

Cynthia paused here before looking deeply at Alfred "I want to find out... where your allegiance lies and if I can trust you".

The room became suffocatingly silent the moment those words sounded out. Alfred looked around him, it had already been a while since he ordered his servants to bring in some tea and snacks.

However, there was no indication of them coming in through the doors. Not only that, it was also now that he realised he was completely surrounded by Her Highness's subordinates.

At some point in time during the discussion, they stationed themselves all around the room, cutting off all the exits and entrances to the room.

Alfred's experienced eyes landed on all these warriors that Her Highness brought over with her. Even though they were just standing around without exhibiting their power, he could tell from their demeanour that all of them were powerful and battle hardened veterans who had seen many bloody battlefields.

The air that they exuded couldn't be imitated. He could tell because he had seen and mingled with many adventurers over the years.

Haha... Alfred couldn't help but laugh inwardly. He felt like there was no reason for Her Highness to do something like this. Only a fool would try to escape when there was such a high level security.

Nonetheless, he got up from his seat and kneeled on his knees.

"My allegiance is always to Ellesmere. I am a noble of the kingdom of Ellesmere and loyal to the late King Henry" Alfred declared in an even voice.

Hearing his declaration, Cynthia arched her brows and smiled "Hoh, to still declare that your allegiance lies to the king even though he is no more, are you suggesting that you are not going to support the royal prince and princess' or should I see this as rebellion against the crown?"

Even though she had fallen from grace and had to rely on a demon to save her kingdom, she was nevertheless still the most extraordinary princess of the kingdom. She knew the politics like the back of her hand and use the noble's weakness against them.

"I am sure you must have been approached by my brothers to join their faction many times. Yet despite that, you refuse to join any side. Why is that?"...

Alfred blinked his eyes and looked at Cynthia in confusion. How did she know that he hadn't joined any sides?

"How did you..." Before he could complete, his query was soon answered by the former

"It's not hard to know you haven't joined any faction. Just looking at the condition of your fief, I can tell that those dastardly brothers of mine did not take the news of your not joining their sides in a good way. Not only did they cut off all trade routes to your region, they are also sending all the injured and the destitute all the way over here to encumber and weaken your region"

"This must be Alstin's doing, he had been a very vindictive person since childhood. It looks like he is still alive. Anyways, the fact that he hadn't attacked you and is still tolerating your incooperation means that you haven't joined Aiden either".

It needs to be mentioned that it hasn't been that long since Her Highness the princess arrived at the city of Mountmend. Yet in those few moments, she was able to accurately ascertain his condition just by looking at this place.

Alfred was left in awe of Cynthia's extraordinariness once again. 'No wonder she was called the light of Ellesmere' he thought inside his head.

"It as you say, Your Highness. When I said the same thing to His Highness Prince Alstin, he was not too pleased. Although he did not attack me, he had been sending war threats through sound transmission"

"As for Prince Aiden, he got in touch with me through sound transmission. However, ever since I refused his offer, I haven't heard anything from him. That said, please believe me when I say it's not my intention to rebel against the crown. It's just that I wanted to keep my people and land safe from battle and wars"

"You have seen it with your own eyes, your highness, the state of the city and its people. In a situation where we don't even have food on our tables, how can I ask my people to go to war"

Alfred plead his case. Though he was bowing his head and was surrounded by all these powerful warriors there was not even a trace of fear that could be felt from his body.

It could be said that the count, Alfred was ready to lay down his life since the moment he opened his mouth to say all that.

"I thought as much. Count Alfred is not an enemy, everybody you can relax" On her words, her subordinates walked away from the exit.

"Please forgive our rudeness, your highness. However, to ensure that no leaks got out, we had to do something like this"

The old assassin Bert apologised. It was his idea that they should surround the count in case he turned out to be an informer of the other princes'.

"Well then Count, although I understand your situation, I can't just take your answer to stay neutral in this battle. You should know that this battle is no longer a fight between the royal siblings but a full blown war between kingdoms for survival. Now that the capital and multiple regions have fallen, we have to unite and fight them off. This is the reason why I came here. Count Alfred, I need your help enlisting all those soldiers and people who were pushed back from their homes".

Most of the destitute and homeless people flooding the town of Mountmend were soldiers who were injured in the battle or young people who got kicked out of their land.

If Cynthia could enlist all of these people under her banner, it would give her forces what they needed, numbers. She already had the quality, all that was needed to make her own army was numbers and the city of Mountmend was the perfect place to set her plans in motion.

Alfred was silent for a while as he contemplated Cynthia's words. Just like had said, this was no longer a power struggle between siblings but a war for the survival of their kingdom.

As a noble of this land, how could he not fight for it? In fact, he had mulled over this option for a while now; however, whenever he thought about Alstin or Aiden, those incompetent and arrogant princes becoming the ruler of the kingdom, he couldn't help but have double thoughts.

That said, it was before he knew that Her Highness the princess, was alive. If it was her, then it was a totally different case than with the princes'.

Not only was she extraordinary, she had all the qualities that a ruler of a country should have.

Chapter 796- Raid On Castledor (4)

The kingdom of Ellesmere hadn't had a history of a queen ruling the land but Alfred felt like a change was needed for a time like this.

And so, he finally made his decision. Bending his knee a little, arching his back and while extending his right hand forward, he made a noble's bow.

"If Your Highness is determined to take the kingdom of Ellesmere back from the invaders and rule it as its queen, then allow me Count Alfred Eude Bergest, to help you in your endeavour".

.

.

Capital City Ellesmere...

The once prosperous city and an infrastructural marvel of the kingdom, had now succumbed to the ravages of war. Streets ran scorching black with residue of destruction and the buildings reduced to nothing but mere rubble.

Shattered glass littered the ground like morbid confetti, the air was heavy with the burnt scent of wood and the despair of a city that had witnessed its own demise.

The current capital city of Ellesmere painted a bleak picture of what was once a thriving metropolis. That said, it was not like the entire city had been razed down as there was still a structure that was standing tall.

Amidst the desolation, the royal palace stood like an island of grandeur in a sea of ruin. Its majestic spires, though marred by the signs of conflict, still retained an air of regality. The royal palace was one of the few structures that had yet to crumble like everything around it.

At this moment, inside one of the hidden underground chambers of the palace, bound in sturdy chains to a pole, was a handsome young man or what remained of a handsome young man now marred with injuries and wounds. His body released a dark greyish aura and he lay there chained motionless just like a corpse.

"Hey, isn't it bad? That prince really died. If we don't have him won't we be unable to convince those remaining nobles of this kingdom who are still fighting to give up?" One of the guards responsible for monitoring the prisoner, spoke.

"Mind your own business. Soldiers like us shouldn't poke our noses where it doesn't belong. I'm sure His Majesty and the general knows what they are doing" the other soldier monitoring the situation along with him, replied.

CLACK...CLACK... at this moment, the sounds of footsteps rang out and a person with an impressive build and decked out in full body armour, walked in.

"General" The soldiers saluted.

"At ease" the man who was the general nodded before shifting his attention to the man behind the prison.

"There are no movements Sir. It looks like his body was too weak to take in that energy"...

"So he failed to become a Tainted Warrior huh? It would have been much easier to take control of this country had he become our puppet. Well, it's no use crying over spilt milk. We need to change our strategy, I will let his majesty know. You two get rid of that body, before it goes berserk" Leaving behind those instructions, the general left the underground cellar.

"Let's hurry up and dispose of the body. You know how hard it is to deal with a tainted warrior when they go berserk"

With that, the soldier got to work. And just like that, the curtain closed on the Second Prince of the kingdom of Ellesmere, Aiden Ethan Ellesmere.

Around a week later, inside the Castle of Duke Montford, the first prince received a report from one of his subordinates.

Alstin crumpled the paper on his hand and threw it inside the fireplace "This can't be happening, there is no way this is true. You... have you checked the authenticity of this report" he asked turning his eyes at the kneeling subordinate.

"Yes Your Highness, there is no mistake that it was sent by the spies we dispatched in the city of Mountmend" the latter responded.

"Tch, why now of all times? I was about to convince the southern nobles too" Alstin clicked his tongue and ordered the subordinate.

"Make sure you don't spill the content of this report to anyone else, not even to Duke Montford and especially not to Lucas. I will deal with this mess myself. Do you understand?"...

"Yes".

After the two of them left the room, a figure covertly entered in and pulled the parchment from the fireplace. Surprisingly, even after being thrown into the fire, most of the page was yet to be turned into ashes completely.

"Hoh" the figure muttered, reading the contents of the page. Flames burned in his hand and quickly turned the parchment into ashes.

"I guess, I'll go pay her a visit".

.

.

Inside the city of Mountmend, near Alfred's manor, lines of tables could be seen placed in a neat and orderly way. Placed on top of all those tables, were large boxes containing food and rations.

Large queues of people lined up before those tables who were handed out these foods.

"Please don't cut lines. We have enough for everyone" the workers distributing the food announced.

"Here you go old man"

The old man in the line reached out and grabbed the rations. He then bowed his head and with tears streaming down his cheeks, he cried "Long live Her Highness... long live Her Highness"...

"Alright, alright... next"

The worker handed out the ration to the next person and they spoke the exact same line. In fact, whether it was at this table or the many others, the long queue of people lining up before it spoke the same praise.

Everybody in the city of Mountmend knew that the food that they were given, came from Her Highness, Princess Cynthia. She was the reason that they were able to go to sleep with a full stomach for the past few days.

That's right, the distribution of rations wasn't a new thing today, it has been going on for the past week.

"Your Highness giving out food to the whole city like that, is there even any meaning to it?" Inside the manor, Alvara glanced out of the window looking at the long lines of people as she asked.

"Feeding all the citizens of the city which has been overpopulated thanks to the aftermath of the war puts a serious burden even on our resources that we got after defeating the criminal organisations. If we keep feeding them like that, we won't last very long".

Her concerns were warranted after all, feeding a population of over 200,000 wasn't a small matter. If they didn't receive any benefit from it, this whole endeavour would go to waste.

As the princess and a businesswoman who built the Serene Palace Merchant Guild all on her own through perseverance and hard work, Alvara knew that Cynthia would never do something that would result in a loss.

However, no matter how much she thought she couldn't figure out what the princess was thinking.

"Alvara what can you see when you look at the city?" Cynthia answered by asking her a question. Her gaze was also focused on the long queue of people outside the manor.

"A gloomy and starved city filled with refugees"

This was Alvara's honest answer. In fact, no matter who saw the city, they too would come up with the same response.

"Right, a city filled with starved refugees who have been displaced from their homes, grieving at the loss they suffered and barely holding onto their lives. What do you think they need the most?"

"Food and work. In a situation where they can't even fill their bellies, if we force them to fight for us, how do you think they would see us? What we need to do right now is give them time and a proper meal to heal their hearts. Once they are satiated they will have time to think other things in their head" Cynthia answered.

So that was the case, the guard captain nodded her head in understanding. A population that has to scrounge for food every single day, would have no time worrying about anything else.

By providing them food, not only it freed them from scavenging for food, but they now also had enough time to worry about other things.

With time, these people would surely realise the benefit of fighting for Her Highness and the fires of hatred which had been snuffed inside their hearts, would rekindle once again.

It was a move that grasped the hearts of the people. However, Alvara was sure that, the aforementioned reasons weren't the only objective the princess had in mind. No matter how calculative and business driven exterior she showed on the surface, she was a kind person at heart.

Distributing rations and food was her way of showing care for the people who were in the end the citizens of her kingdom.

"By the way, how goes the infiltration on our next target?" Shifting her attention away from the window and towards Annette, Cynthia asked.

"Theodore and his kindreds have already sneaked inside the duke's castle and are currently monitoring the actions of the first prince. From the message they sent me, it looks like Your Highness' brother is losing the war at every front. The eastern region of the kingdom has fallen and the southern nobles have thrown their towels and defected to the enemy's side"

Annette reported. She had already sent Theodore and Maybell to spy on their next target, the dukedom of Montford where the first prince currently was.

Cynthia who aimed to become the queen, not only needed a large army on her side to fight for her sake, she also needed to take out the other contenders out of the game.

Chapter 797- Stealing the Air Engine

In this case, the first prince who was currently her biggest hurdle and the person who had the support of a duke and numerous other nobles.

"By now the news that I am alive should have reached Alstin. Has he already started making plans on how to deal with me?"

Being one of the people who knew him the best, Cynthia knew that her brother wouldn't take the news of her being alive, lightly. She was sure that even at this moment, he was coming up with some unscrupulous plans to take her out of the succession battle.

"It is as Your Highness has said, the first prince is at this moment in a discussion with a couple of his selected subordinates. He is trying to come up with a way to falsify the report of your being alive to the nobles supporting him while at the same time hiring a group of assassins to take you out"

Cynthia already expected to hear something like this as such, Annette's words caused her expression to not falter at all.

"What should we do your highness? If we let that man be, who knows what kind of loathsome plans he would come up with the next time"

Alvara spoke out in concern. Her disregard of the first prince's status and her calling him 'that man' showed how much she hated him. After all, he was one of the main perpetrators who drove Cynthia to run away from the capital and into the depths of despair.

Other than that, he also tried to buy out her people. Alvara was also approached with such an offer, in fact, the prince even tried to put his hands on her body. It was not without any reason that she hated; no, loathed the first prince.

"You are right. I have tolerated him far too much since our childhood days. This caused him to become full of himself and think that he could just do anything he wants and get away with it. This time, I won't take it lying down. I'll make my move before he even has a chance to do anything"

"Alvara, Contact Blake, Wyot and the others. Tell them to prepare to march towards the Castledor city with an elite team. We will raid Castledor city and capture my brother"...

"Yes Your Highness" Alvara nodded her head and quickly went off to carry out her orders. This left only Cynthia and Annette inside the room.

"By the way, did he leave any instruction for me" It was pretty much clear who she was referring to with those words.

In response to her question, Annette smiled and shook her head "Master is very pleased by the results you have shown in the tower town and has asked us to protect you properly. He believes that if it's you, you will be able to complete your mission without him needing to give any instructions. Nevertheless, he asked us to tell you that, you can ask for his assistance anytime that you require his aid. Master will do everything in his power to aid you".

"I see... I must thank him for all that he did"...

"That is good; however, I believe there is no need. Master is doing all that because you are now part of his family".

Annette's answer took Cynthia by surprise. It was true that for someone who had no choice but to depend on his aid unilaterally, he treated her far too well.

Whether it be when she took refuge in his dungeon or now, he was doing his best to aid her just like he had promised. At the beginning when she made the soul contract with Simon, she thought that as the party who had nothing much to offer in return, she would only get the bare minimum aid in return.

However, far from it, the demon not only sent his best subordinates, but he made it so that the event would flow in a direction that worked completely in her favour.

She couldn't understand why the demon would aid her so much; nevertheless, when she heard Annette mutter the words family, a warm feeling surged in her heart whenever she recalled the image of the demon in her mind.

At that moment, Cynthia had no idea what those feelings were, it would only be much later down the line that she would find out what those feelings meant.

The Tower Town wasn't too far away from the city of Mountmend. As such, after Cynthia gave those orders, Blake and the others leading a team of elite adventurers arrived near the city at the first signs of dawn of the very next day.

A cavalcade of carriages carrying adventurers and various goods and items necessary for the raid, could be seen parked near the city gates. Needless to say, all of these carriages and items either belonged to the Serene Palace Merchant Guild or was provided by the merchants through Cynthia's connection.

"Blamenco, I'll leave you in charge here. Keep doing as per the plan, and keep me updated about the situation here. I believe it will take some time to deal with those stuck up nobles who are in cahoots with my brother even after I deal with him. As such, as soon as the army finishes forming here, lead them towards the Castledor city"

"You can use Alfred's aid to manage the army. Although he is an official and no good with military strategies, when it comes to internal management, there are only a few nobles of his calibre"

Explaining everything that needed to be explained, Cynthia left a few of her subordinates in charge and left the city of mountmend for Castledor.

Castledor City, the capital of the dukedom of Montford, was quite a bit far from here. Even by travelling with Bane Moose drawn carriages, it would take more than a month to reach Castledor.

Furthermore, a vast forest region filled with bandits and monsters lay in the middle of the two territories that one must tread through to reach Castldor.

Northern Outlaw Forest... if Simon was here, he would find the place quite nostalgic as this was exactly the path he had once travelled from to reach the capital while posing as an adventurer.

Two days later after the start of their journey from Mountmend, Cynthia and her group reached the northern outlaw forest. Surrounded by tall trees that spread all around like a thick canopy that even blotted out the sunlight, the forest region gave off an ominous atmosphere.

Distant cries of the monsters could be heard coming intermittently from inside the forest causing the members of the group to raise their guard. That said, even though the place was dangerous and full of monsters and bandits, the group wasn't too much on their guard.

In fact, they even appear to be a little relaxed and the atmosphere was a light one. Looking at them, it wouldn't seem like they were at all concerned about entering a dangerous forest region.

Their attitude was more like they were out on a stroll in the park. And that was actually the case. The Northern Otulaw Forest might be dangerous; however, that was by the standards of an ordinary adventurers.

For Elites like them who were all high level and had years of experience under their belt, a place like the northern outlaw forest was nothing. If anything, they had already experienced, numerous life and death battles which was much more dangerous and worse than this place.

After all that, it would be strange on the contrary for them to be afraid of a place like the northern outlaw forest.

As the night had already fallen, Cynthia and her group were camping at the edges of the forest, near a small brook. Some were creating a fireplace, some setting up tents, while some went inside the forest to hunt monsters.

Every adventurer was doing something or the other.

"So this the place where Master camped all those years ago" Annette muttered as she took in the night view of the forest.

Even though this was her first time coming to such a place, she had already seen the adventures her master had gone through as such, she was already quite familiar with the place.

That said, this was still her first time experiencing something like this for herself and thus couldn't help but feel a tinge of excitement. The view, the air, the atmosphere and even the company, everything was new for her.

One of the goals that Simon had for sending his subordinates away from the dungeon and on a mission on their own, was for them to gain plenty of experiences and broaden their horizon.

Looking at Annette's current state, which was like a child curious about everything around her, it could be said that one of his goals was partially achieved.

There was no doubt that they had much more to learn and know about this world; nevertheless, the experience today would forever stay with them and become a part of their strength.

Whoosh... Wild wind blew, rustling the leaves of the trees, from nearby clinking noise of glass and the rowdy laugh of the adventurers could be heard.

Annette who was taking everything in, suddenly arched her beautiful eyebrows and held her hand near her ears. This was a sign that she had received a special message transmission from one of her teammates.

"I see... keep monitoring him and the other for the time being. I will let her know about this" After saying so, Annette cut the communication and made her way over to the main tent where Cynthia and the others were.

Chapter 798- Stealing the Air Engine (2)

Inside the tent, the princess stood before a large table, pointing at the map and giving instructions to the adventurers and her fellow subordinates. Emma who was tasked with guarding her was also there silently standing still like a doll.

"If we take the most travelled route, it would take us more than a month to reach our destination. As this is a raid, we must make haste and strike at our opponents when they least expect us. If we go with the path the people usually use, we will lose the factor of surprise. Which is why, I propose that we march straight making a beeline through the forest" Cynthia spoke, highlighting her plans.

"Hmm, it's not a bad idea" Blake muttered looking at the map "However, Your Highness you are forgetting one thing. The northern outlaw forest is named as such because of the numerous outlaws that amass here"

"A straight path will lead straight to their den and then there are also the monsters we have to look out for. If we factor all that in, the speed of our march regardless of which path we choose, will end up being the same".

He pointed at a particular region of the map that was still mostly uncharted.

"About that, you don't have to worry about the bandits. The town they created, the Black town has been razed to the ground" Expecting the adventurers to bring out the subject of bandits, Cynthia dropped a shocking revelation.

Black town was razed!! As one would expect, as soon as the adventurers heard that, most of them wore an astonished expression. Those from the kingdom, knew that the Northern Outlaw Forest got its infamy because of the numerous cases of arson and stealing that happened around here.

Nobody knew when but at some unknown point in time, the forest became a black region that attracted all sorts of criminals and outlaws from all around the kingdom. Be it murderers, simple thieves or even rogue adventurers, those who did not get along with the society, found themselves here.

And the black town was the town that they established deep inside the northern outlaw forest. It has no laws and everything from the slightest fight to even the most brutal atrocities was common there.

Essentially, it was a town that was ruled by the laws of the jungle. Strong survived while the weak was preyed upon.

The establishment of such a dangerous place of course raised some concerns. However, every time the neighbouring dukes tried to take the outlaws down, they would either get away by hiding or by bribing off the nobles.

Thus the reason why the black town managed to survive so far. That said, only a few people who have actually travelled to the black town or are privy to some information, would know that the actual reason why the black town manages to survive every time, is because of some of the powerful ex-adventurers and heinous criminals whose names had once shaken the kingdom, now lost in the annals of history rumoured to be still surviving and hiding inside the black town.

Blake being one of the people who had once travelled to the Black town, and had seen those ancient legends up close, was the most shocked.

The names like Godwin, Raven, Benny Beckman or Karina Lowell only came much later on. Before them, it was the era of people like Adger the axe hand, bloody blade Orman and Zackary the unkillable, the kingdom's most powerful adventurers and criminals.

As long as they were there, there was no way the black town could be destroyed. Then again, the princess was not among the people to joke about matters of importance like the black town.

Which could only mean that the black town was actually razed to the ground along with all those people. To be able to defeat legends like the Axe hand Adger and Zackary the unkillable, it was not

like there was no such individual amongst Her Highness' people who could achieve something like this.

The two women who always stuck close to Her Highness and that unusual group of demi humans came to mind. If it were those people, then it wasn't unimaginable.

After fighting and going through the ordeals in the tower town together, Blake had come to realise something. The group of people around Her Highness except for Alvara and the others, were very peculiar.

This evaluation of his was not just based on their appearance and race but also on their character and strength. Although he had only seen them fight once or twice, he knew that every single one of them was insanely strong.

And from the few times he tried to interact with them, he came to know about their personality which was very callous, detached and unempathetic. As if everything that was going on around them, had nothing to do with them and they viewed everything from the perspective of a third person.

In short, it was very different from the way people like them viewed things. It was for this reason that he believed them to be very peculiar.

Come to think of it, he hasn't seen the group of demihumans and those two children around for a while. Their unusual disappearance and the news about the Black Town being razed. Blake quickly put the two and two together.

And as if to prove that his hunch was right, Cynthia glanced towards the woman named Annette who assured everyone inside the tent to no worry about the bandits of the Black Town.

"If Her Highness and Miss Annette are saying so then taking a straight path through the forest would be the best option and less time consuming. Assuming that we don't have to worry about the bandits which makes the monsters the only thing for us to deal with, it would significantly increase our travel speed"

Wyot commented, adding in his thoughts. It appeared that he too must have realised something.

Now that their travel route had been decided, the group discussed about the other various things like their formation, teams, switching times, camping grounds and other such things before retiring into their own tents for the day.

After everyone left, Cynthia and Annette were the only ones left inside the tent.

"So, what's going on? Did you receive a report?" Noticing the slight change in Annette's behaviour Cynthia asked.

The former nodded her head and reiterated the report she heard from one of her teammates.

"An air engine has taken off from Duke's castle last night and is headed for the city of Mountmend. Considering its speed, it must have already entered the forest region. What do you want to do, Your Highness?"...

Cynthia calmly heard Annette's report before asking a question "Who is onboard?"...

"Lucas Blackwood, Benny Beckerman and a few other individuals for a total of nine individuals. Given their number and level, I don't think they have any good intention for coming over".

"Lucas huh" She muttered crossing her arms "It looks like he still hasn't given up even after I rejected his proposal. If he is coming over with someone like Beny Beckerman, then it must mean that he has heard the news of me being alive"

"However, my brother won't allow Lucas who is now the successor of Duke Montford, to come to me on his own. The fact that he used the air engine, the exclusive ship of Lord Montford's to sneak out at night, I must mean that he is not on orders from my brother". Cynthia only needed a few information to know the motives and plans of the other party.

"How do you plan to take care of it, Your Highness? If you wan't, I can tell the others to strike down the Air Engine and take care of the people inside" Annette suggested.

"No, find a way to make them aware that I am here. Once Lucas knows that I am in the Northern Outlaw Forest, he will surely land the Air Engine. Once they are out, we can then take them out".

Manufacturing an Air Engine costs a fortune and the kingdom of Ellesmere does not have the technology to build them. Instead of destroying the Air Engine, Cynthia planned to use it for herself in the upcoming raid against the Castledor city. At that time it would no doubt prove extremely useful.

"I don't like imposing on you again, but can you please take care of those on board? If I let the forces on our side to engage them, who knows how many losses we will suffer? I cannot let that happen before the raid" She turned towards Annette and requested.

"Leave it to us, Master specifically asked me to aid you in every way possible. Since you want the Air Engine, then that's what will happen"

The maid simply nodded her head and nonchalantly accepted the task. Her attitude was so casual that it didn't seem like she had just accepted a dangerous and troublesome task but instead something as insignificant as going off to the market to buy some vegetables.

"Are you certain that you will be able to win? The other party has Lucas, Benny Beckerman and other high level individuals"

Cynthia asked in concern. Since she hadn't personally seen Annette and the others fighting, she didn't know exactly how strong they were. Nevertheless, given that they were 'his' subordinates, she believed that they were quite strong. But so were Benny Beckerman and Lucas.

Seeing Cynthia Worry for her, Annette couldn't help but smile. "Your Highness does not need to worry about me. If I can't even handle the likes of them, then I would be shaming myself and the title of Valkyrie".

Chapter 799- Ghouls

"Just leave it to me, I'll take care of them as soon as they land"

Saying so, Annette left the tent. On the break of the dawn the next day, the group set forth marching through the forest.

The journey although exciting was a less thrilling one. With the threat of the bandits gone, the adventurers only had to take care of the monster that attacked them and avoid their territories.

The sentries looked out for dangers while teams of adventurers cleared the path. They would timely switch their places to relieve their exhaustion and the other teams would take their place.

And just like this, the group made their way through the forest. Two days passed by amidst the never changing journey. On this day, a change that nobody expected, occurred.

It happened so fast that nobody even had time to question why it happened or what caused it. Cynthia and her group who were making their way forward as usual, were suddenly informed of the impending danger.

A large monster horde was swarming towards this way, ploughing through the land and trees as they did. The forest that had been silent all this time, suddenly came alive.

"Everyone get into formation. I want all capable hands on the ground. Warriors maintain the frontline, Assassins scatter, mages go in the backlines, protect her highness and the noncombatants"

Blake hurriedly gave out orders as he rushed out to the front. At his shout, the entire group hurriedly got into the formation and awaited the horde of monsters.

After a short while, the earth started trembling and the constant thudding noises of something hitting the ground repeatedly came along with it. And then the next second, when all nerves were stretched taut, the monster horde arrived.

Direwolves, Warring Mandirlls, Battle Bears, all sorts of monsters that one would usually encounter on the upper floors of the dungeon, could be seen in the mob.

These monsters although would give a level 200 adventurers a hard time, for elites adventurers like them who were all above level 400, they were no match at all. That said, in that number even if a monster was individually weak, they still possessed a significant threat.

"Warriors, maintain the formation, do not let the monster break past. Mages prepare your spells"
Blake hurriedly barked out orders as the first line of monsters crashed into the front line.

The warriors used their shields and swords to cull down the monsters and stop their advance. Assassins danced around the battlefield, appearing and disappearing using their stealth skill and ambushing the monsters to reduce the strain on the frontliners.

Mana in the surroundings coalesced as spells from the mages took shape. A rain of magic came bombarding the monsters reducing their numbers. The adventurers kept on at it, maintaining their guard and not allowing any casualties to appear.

However, that said the numbers of the monsters was too ridiculous. No matter how many they defeated, more and more would surge out from the backlines, replacing the ones on the front.

Blake and the others grit their teeth and hanged on, just when it seemed like this would be a long gruelling battle, the monster horde suddenly split and changed direction. They completely avoided the group of adventurers and kept on moving forward.

"Huff... huff... what is going on? Why did the monsters suddenly start ignoring us?"

Wyot appeared out of his stealth and asked. Even a veteran adventurer like him who had faced many powerful monsters, was out of breath facing those numbers. From this one could imagine how stupendously large the horde was. Fortunately for them, they didn't have to fight the horde anymore.

"I have no idea; however, it doesn't seem like they were after us from the start. The way they were moving it seemed like they were in a hurry for something; no almost scared. As if they were getting away from something and didn't want to get caught in the midst of it" Blake assessed looking at the monsters who were frantically focused on running away.

"Are you saying that they were running from something? What could cause these monsters to run away?"...

"I don't know; however, whatever it is, it must have scared these monsters and forced them to flee from their territory. Let's proceed with caution. Even if Northern Outlaw Forest does not pose any threat to us, it is always better to be extra careful"

It seemed like he was speaking with experience rather than just being overly paranoid. The adventurers nodded and proceeded with caution.

On their way forward, they felt multiple energy signatures coming off from the distance. These energy signatures were extremely strong so much so that the shockwaves of their clash could be felt even from such a far distance.

This made it certain that something was going on inside the forest. The group continued to march albeit with a slight tension in the air. The powerful energy waves that continued to come from the distance, scared a good number of monsters away from their territory, because of which the group had to fight on more occasions which caused their speed to come to a crawl.

Thankfully, it lasted for an hour or two before it became completely silent once again. The forest too returned to its usual atmosphere.

At the same moment, inside Cynthia's coach in the backlines, a graceful woman wearing a pair of glasses that gave her a cold intellectual aura and accentuated her beauty, silently entered and sat down beside the princess.

"Have you taken care of it already?"

Cynthia asked in surprise. How long had it been that she was gone? It wouldn't even be more than two hours, yet in that time frame, she left the place to carry out her task and returned back swiftly without making anyone realise that she was gone.

That's right, Annette had gone off on her own, and nobody in the group had the slightest idea. She who always stood close to the princess as if to guard her, left her post to Emma and disappeared for a couple of hours.

She returned so swiftly and without any scratch on her body or breaking a sweat that it made one wonder if completing the task was even a challenge for her. That being said, Cynthia knew that the task shouldn't have been easy after all, the task required dealing with Benny Beckerman, Lucas and a couple of other powerful people.

As if to tell her that she was worrying for nothing, Annette stated "Your Highness the task has been completed".

.

.

A few hours ago, deep inside the Northern Outlaw Forest, an air engine landed on a small mountaintop. As the entrance of the cockpit opened, Lucas, Benny along with seven other people walked out.

The seven people were each wearing a garb that was not any less impressive than Lucas's own. Although not [S] rank, the armours and weapons of these weapons were made of Mythril at the very least indicating that these people weren't your average Joe.

In fact, these people were some of the finest warriors of the kingdom.

"Are you sure the information is correct?" Lucas turned towards one of the people who looked like an Assassin and asked.

"Don't worry, I have known that person for a long time, he can be trusted. Since it's him who told me about it, it must be true" The latter replied.

The informer the assassin was talking about, was a resident of the Black Town. Someone who lived in the black town, was either an outlaw or a criminal. Naturally, Lucas would doubt the authenticity of their words.

Trusting the Assassin, Lucas and the others, waited for the informant to arrive at their location to get a more in depth information. Soon, the informant arrived at the scene.

As one would expect, the guy had the appearance of an average hoodlum, a lowlife who was used to doing all the rough and dirty.

"See, he arrived. I told you, I have been doing business with him for a long time, he can be trusted"

The informant named Jarr did not say anything, his white face that was paler than even snow and bloodshot eyes continued to simply stare at the assassin and the others.

20:07

The assassin argued. He walked up to the person to welcome him when...

"Wait, something doesn't look right" Benny cautioned. However, ignoring his warnings, the assassin approached the informant and hooked his arms around the latter's shoulder.

"What's wrong Benny, don't tell me you haven't dealt with the people of the black town before. Na, Jarr tell him something?".

The informant named Jarr did not say anything, his white face that was paler than even snow and bloodshot eyes continued to simply stare at the assassin and the others.

"You look weird, did something happen?"

Just as the assassin tilted his head at the puzzling behaviour of his friend, Jarr opened his mouth. Sharp fangs appeared and flashed in front of his eyes before the assassin was bit.

Grrrr... growling, the informant placed his fangs right at the assassin's neck.

"kugh!! You... get away from me"

BAM... the latter being much powerful than Jarr, pushed him far away.

"Are you alright?" His team caught up with him at this moment and backed him up.

"Tch" the assassin touched the area of his neck where a piece of his flesh was gnawed on and couldn't help but click his tongue.

"What the hell is wrong with this motherfucker? Suddenly he starts biting at people, has he gone insane?".

"See I told you? It happened because you didn't listen to me"

Benny sneered. His mocking eyes became serious when he turned towards the informant who was making some silly growling sounds.

Chapter 800- Ghouls (2)

"Ruurrghh... Grrruughh"

Jarr whose bloodshot eyes were still focused on Lucas and his group, slowly got up and started rushing towards them again.

BANG... this time though, they were all prepared, thus none of them got caught off guard. Benny kicked the informant away before he could even get close and sent him crashing into a tree.

"Hoh!! He got up so soon. He got some spunk I admit" he commented seeing Jarr pick himself up again.

"Isn't he just level 155? How did he receive no injury even after getting hit by your attack?" Lucas from the side questioned.

"Who knows, we can question him when he comes to his mind" Saying so, Benny stirred a little bit of his aura, evident that he was a little serious now.

BANG... With an audible boom, he sent the informant flying again.

"Uh-Oh, I forgot to control my strength" The kick this time, sent Jarr flying through the air and crashing heavily into the tree.

CRACK... the sounds of bones breaking and blood splattering was evident. Benny was a level 600+ warrior and the informant was merely around level 155, there was no comparison between the two.

Although he held back most of his powers so as to not outright kill him, the force behind that kick was still enough to render the other party unconscious. After suffering that attack there was no way he was going to get up.

That being said, because Benny made a mistake in controlling his strength, he accidentally sent Jarr flying too high up which resulted in the latter crashing into the top parts of the tree and a branch piercing through their stomach.

PSSHH... guts spilled down on the ground, making for quite a gory scene.

"Dammit, Benny. Why did you go and kill him? We needed the information from that man" Lucas complained in annoyance. They needed Jarr alive to get more information about the situation from

him. However, with him dead, there was no way they were going to get any information back from him.

"Ahh man, I tried to control my strength but he moved at the last second. Anyways, we can't help it now that he is dead" Benny spat tearing his eyes away from Jarr.

"Let's go to the Black Town, there are plenty of informants like this man there. I'm sure a couple of them would have the information on the princess that you want".

Lucas nodded begrudgingly. A man like Jarr was dime a dozen in the black town. He was sure that he would find the information he wanted on Cynthia there. In the first place, the news about her came from there only.

With that, just as the group turned around and started walking towards the direction of the black town, a surprising event that shocked Lucas and his group to their very core, occurred.

Jarr's body which they all thought was dead, suddenly started moving.

"Ruurrghh... Grrruughh" the growling started and slowly but surely, he pulled his body out of the branch.

"Wha-What... how is this possible? How is he still alive?"

There was a gaping hole in Jarr's stomach, his guts and intestines which had spilled out, was still dangling on the tree. With the amount of damage he suffered, there was no way he should still be alive much less moving like this.

Maybe because the kick from Benny fractured a couple of his bones too, Jarr was making his way over while walking like a cripple.

"Does anybody know what is going on?"

Benny questioned. The scene occurring in front of him was just too freaky to make sense. Even if he asked his teammates, no one had the answer.

"Tch, then I'll just take him down and then question him" Deciding so, Benny stepped forward and roughed Jarr. Nevertheless, every time the latter fell down, they would get back up again.

This happened again and again causing the initial shock that everyone felt, to deepen even further.

"You gotta be kidding me right? He; no, this thing is still alive with his lower half missing?"...

"Step back Benny. Since physical means don't work, then I'll just burn him to ashes with my magic"

Lucas started conjuring as soon as he said those words. Seconds later, a large fireball more than ten meters big and releasing extreme heat, materialised. On his command, the fireball descended and completely engulfed Jarr within.

Benny jumped back and watched the scene from the distance. It appeared that magic was the solution as he could see the informant turning into ashes.

"Phew, what a weird guy. Hey, are all your friends weirdos like this?" he asked the assassin who did not reply.

"Well, it doesn't matter now that he is dead. Let's go to the black town" Lucas urged. As soon as he uttered those words, a reply that he didn't expect, came from some unknown place.

"The black town is gone. There is no point even if you go there".

Their bodies jolting awake, Lucas and the others hurriedly turned around in alarm. However, no matter where they looked for the owner of the voice, they couldn't find anyone.

"Who is there? Show yourself. Are you the one who sent him?"

Lucas questioned. He spread his senses all around the area trying to figure out where the voice was coming from.

"Well, technically I wasn't the one to turn them like this; however, you are right. I was the one to send them after you" the voice replied. From the tone and pitch of the voice, one could tell that the owner of the voice was a female.

Them? Lucas had several questions; however, he suppressed them all down. At this moment, all of his senses and danger skills, was sending alarm bells inside his mind, warning him of the danger the mysterious voice represented.

To be able to cause him to fear, Lucas was inwardly extremely surprised. It needs to be mentioned that he was an unprecedented genius who had reached the level of 500 at the age of 50.

There was only a few people in the entire kingdom who had reached that realm. The number was even lower if one counted his talent and age.

To be able to make him fear with just their voice, even Benny Beckman who was regarded as the strongest man in the kingdom was unable to make him feel fear like this. Yet the owner of the voice hadn't even shown themselves and his danger skills was already sensing danger.

It was not only him, every one of them sensed danger from the mysterious voice.

"Are you going to the Black Town?" the voice asked starting an unexpected conversation.

"So you were spying on us from the start?"

Since the other party was able to conceal themselves pretty much perfectly, it was no surprise that they heard of all their conversation.

"Spying is kind of a big word, I do not have such weird hobbies" For some reason the owner of the voice denied those words strongly "Hmph, I know your objective because I was the one who leaked that news in the first place"...

"What?"

As soon as the voice said those words, Lucas and the others couldn't help but widen their eyes. Why would they not after all, if one were to believe her words, it would suggest that it was all a trap set by her.

The news that Princess Cynthia was travelling with a band of adventurers to Castledor from the city of Mountmend and that she was currently inside the Northern Outlaw Forest was what brought Lucas and the others here.

Was all of it a lie? Why did the owner of the voice do that? And what objective could they have?

"You look confused? I guess I didn't make myself clear" Saying so, the mysterious voice who had been speaking to them from an unknown place showed themselves.

It was a woman of unordinary beauty. She had long black hair that was neatly tied into a bun, a graceful and curvaceous body that contained incredible allure and a face that made her seem almost otherworldly.

Her beautiful black eyes that was highlighted by her spectacles gave her a sophisticated look.

For people like them, who weren't used to seeing a woman of such extraordinary beauty, they were instantly enamoured. All they could see in their eyes was the woman and the thoughts of lust overwhelmed their mind.

The only people who were able to resist her beauty were Lucas and Benny. Although they weren't entranced, one could still see the look of shock hidden in their eyes.

"I guess it's our first time meeting; however, I know you two very well. Anyway, it's nice to meet you. I am Annette, the loyal maid of Lord Simon. Currently, I am working under Her Highness Cynthia on orders of my master" Annette introduced herself.

"Did you say, Cynthia?" Lucas repeated.

"That's right. Perhaps did I not make myself clear?"...

"Wait, are you saying that you work under Cynthia? Does that mean that she is here?"

Annette did not answer, from Cynthia she became aware of how infatuated Lucas was towards her.

"Perhaps, perhaps not. In any case, the matter about Her Highness won't matter to you from today onwards"...

"What's that supposed to mean?"...

"Exactly what I said"

Saying so, Annette clapped her hands. At that very instant growling noises started coming off from all around the forest around them. Lucas, Benny and the others sensed multiple presences surrounding them.

"This is bad" Benny spoke narrowing his eyes. Not only were they unable to sense this woman named Annette coming, they were distracted enough by her that they did not even realise the other presences approaching them.