

## D. of Pride 801

### Chapter 801- Ghouls (3)

The group of nine prepared themselves to fight. At that moment, the very first batch of presences that surrounded them appeared before eyes. It was humans, their movements were sluggish and there was something bizarre about them.

"Wait aren't they the denizens of the Black Town?"

One of them recognised the people or more like it was the only logical conclusion after all, who in their sane mind would choose to sit in the Norther Outlaw Forest other than the people of the Black Town?

"Something is wrong, look at them. They look exactly like that weird informant" Benny warned.

"Good observation, all of them are the same as the one you took out"...

"You mean that unkillable thing?"...

"They are not something but humans who have been converted into lesser Ghouls, a kin of the lesser vampires by Miss Maybell's kindreds. They will also be your opponent" Annette answered, introducing the opponents to them.

"Lesser Ghouls?!!!" Before Lucas and the others could even comprehend what those words meant, the army of Lesser Ghouls started rushing towards them.

"Dammit, it looks like we have been had. Everyone prepare for battle" With Benny leading, the group faced off against the enemy.

Lesser Ghouls, born as the spawn of shadows, they are a kin to the lesser vampires. They are eerie beings that dwell in the realm between life and death. These creatures although not a full fledged vampire, share a semblance with them in their undying nature.

No matter the severity of the wounds inflicted upon them, be it through piercing blades or spells of destruction, Lesser Ghouls seem impervious to the grasp of death. Because of their undying

resilience that allows them to keep moving even after sustaining life threatening wounds, is what makes them an excellent footsoldier.

Other than that, their voracious hunger that drives them to relentlessly attack any living being, not for sustenance but simply as a means of pure pleasure is what makes them a threat and a menace.

They seek to drain the life force from the living, drawing sustenance from the very breath of their victims.

Despite all the semblance, one shouldn't mistake them for a vampire after all ghouls are merely just a footsoldier, a cannon fodder in the hierarchy of the vampires. Although they bear some semblance, they are nowhere near the threat that a vampire represents.

Not only that, even though they are lesser versions of vampires, they are unable to think for themselves and are driven purely by instinct or by the one who created them.

Unlike the vampires, who can regenerate their lost limbs, Ghouls are unable to reciprocate any such abilities. Nevertheless, despite their obviously lacking strength and weakness, what really made them a threat was the fact that they could be mass produced.

That's right, any vampire or higher can create ghouls and have them serve them. These ghouls then can create more of their kind by biting into their prey and the latter doing the same, thus creating a chain where more and more of them are produced.

As could be seen from the scene that was playing out in front of the humans right now.

"Dammit, no matter how many you kill, there are simply no end to them" Culling a couple of ghouls with his sword that was laced with red thunder, Benny complained.

"If you have the strength to complain then it means that you have the energy to kill. It doesn't matter how many of these things she throws at us, they are all individually weak. We just need to deal with their numbers" Lucas answered back.

The others too nodded their head in agreement. If it was before, they would have been surprised at the uncanny undying ability of these ghouls. However, after facing the informant named Jarr, they now knew how to deal with them.

These things or as called as Lesser Ghouls by that woman named Annette are beings that have a high resilience and do not die easily. To kill them you would have to either use magic to destroy their body or use overwhelming force to blast them into smithereens.

Another way to kill them is by...

"Attack their heads, it's weakness" Benny shouted.

Unlike wither limbs or any body parts, once the head of the lesser ghoul is cut apart or destroyed, they stop completely.

Finding this weakness, made it easier to ward off the army of ghouls. However, the more they fell, the more the woman would bring forth with just the clap of hands. The scene seemed never ending like a nightmare that had no end in sight.

"Did this woman turn the entire black town into these things? It can't be right?" somebody joked. However, from the sight in front of them, it hardly seemed like a joke and more of a fact.

"Dammit, it's hard to confront this number while covering for someone. Hey man would you snap out of it and fight these things"

One of the warrior looked at the Assassin who had been standing still all this time. Handling these many numbers, even with their high level was proving a little difficult which is why he snapped at the other party.

However, even after being ridiculed, the assassin showed no signs of moving from his place or confronting the ghouls.

"Hey watch out" Just when it seemed like he would be attacked by the ghouls, the enemy simply ignored him and walked past.

What is going on? How did he do that? Just as those questions arrived in their minds, the answer was revealed.

"Gurghhh... Raargghhh" The assassin growled. When he lifted his face up, his complexion had changed completely, turning pale white. Bloodshot eyes and sharp fangs, he looked just like the Ghouls around him.

"This can't be" The warrior who was covering for that assassin was taken aback. He hurriedly put up his shield to defend against that assassin when he realised he was pushed back for the first time since the start of this clash.

The assassin unlike the other ghouls was more powerful. Almost at the same time, the woman who was watching the entire spectacle while standing in the sky spoke.

"It looks like the Lesser Ghouls aren't your match. Then how about we switch it up a level... Clap"

With a clap of her hand, another batch of Ghouls appeared out of the forest. However, unlike the many ghouls around, there was something fundamentally different about them. It was not only their gears which was better than all the other ghouls who only had low quality gears or simple clothes with them.

No, this one, they were special as they held better gears and obviously released a much more powerful aura. They were Greater Ghoul, the evolution that came after Lesser Ghoul.

"Now then how will you deal with them?" With Annette's voice as the signal, the Greater Ghouls joined the battle.

CLANG... CLANG... over at the place where the warrior was, a fierce battle was going on. The assassin who had turned into a Greater Ghoul, attacked the warrior with a relentless force.

With all the lesser ghouls and now even a greater ghoul attacking him, the latter was barely able to hold on. Similar cases could be seen with the others too. They were all struggling to contain the enemy.

Perhaps they weren't in danger of dying; however, they were no longer able to take it easy anymore. They were compelled to use some of their more powerful skills that they have been keeping it away from Annette's eyes.

"Don't let them bite or else you will also turn like them"

To make matters worse, the woman fanned the flames with her words. They had all seen what happened to the assassin who got bitten by a Ghoul, thus they did not dare to get careless and let a ghoul get too close to them.

On top of fighting the greater ghouls, the army of lesser ghouls, trying not to get bitten or even injured, they also had to keep an eye on the woman who was clearly the mastermind behind this ambush.

The armies of ghouls were just there to tire them down, the true opponent was actually the woman standing in the sky, looking down at them with her cold sophisticated eyes.

Why was she attacking them? What motives she had? They had no idea, though one thing was clear. After they finish dealing with the ghouls they will have to fight her next.

"Hmph, fight, fight, keep fighting and tire yourself out. When you are almost exhausted, I will reset the board and reduce all your efforts to nothing. I will throw you into the pits of despair and make you beg for death"

Standing in the air, Annette muttered to herself. The group of nine humans now reduced to eight, had no idea what was coming for them. They fought diligently yet whenever they felt like they reduced a significant number of the ghouls, more and more would pore out from the forest.

The same was the case for the greater Ghouls too. Although they are said to be greater ghouls, they are in the end ghouls too with a higher level. If a lesser ghoul was around 150-200, then a greater would be around level 300. It was just the matter of level.

However, if one thought that they were nothing special and underestimated the greater ghouls they were up for some surprise. Unlike your typical mindless lesser ghoul driven by instincts, the greater ghouls retained some form of mind.

They were not only intelligent, knowing how to feint and attack, they could also use the skills that their human self knew.

#### Chapter 802- Ghouls (4)

It was because of this reason that Lucas and the others were struggling. It was easy to deal with Lesser Ghouls that rushed at you without any thought. However, the Greater Ghouls who knew how to fight and could use skills were tricky to deal with.

And then there was also their numbers, even the Greater Ghouls were in the hundreds. It was really like fighting the entire Black Town. The humans were truly despairing.

"It was just like this that you cornered Master at that time and forced him into a dead end. I will never forget the feeling he felt that day, the betrayal, the despair, the refusal and the dejection that overwhelmed his mind. I swear at the title of Valkyrie bestowed to me by master, that I will let you experience what he felt that day ten times; no hundred times more" Annette vowed.

Flooding the enemy with overwhelming numbers, showing them false hope and crushing their spirits was uncharacteristic of Annette. She usually fought enemies by herself using her magic instead of relying on numbers to tire them out.

The only reason she was doing something that was so unlike her, was because this was a revenge. Revenge for her master who had once been driven to a corner just like this.

Benny Beckerman, one of the main perpetrators who had antagonised their master time and time again was with the group. Since this was an opportunity, Annette made sure that he experienced what her master did back then. Hence the reason behind the group's current predicament.

It could be said that Benny Beckerman was the reason why their group was suffering right now. As Annette watched them with cold callous eyes one of the warriors among the group got bitten.

"Dammit, he got bitten. Everyone, get away from him" Benny cursed. He used his thunder magic to instantly disintegrate hordes of ghouls around him.

"Lucas, if you don't use your magic now, we won't be able to hold on for long" He shouted looking at the mage wearing bright red robes in the backlines.

"You don't need to tell me, my magic is complete, I just needed everyone to fall back"

Lucas stated, his voice rang out amidst his incantation. With the coagulation of mana around him as the indication, the group that was fighting the ghouls backed down. Immediately afterwards, the air in the surroundings took on a crimson hue and a massive amount of flames rolled in.

Like clouds, the golden flames or the infernal magic materialised in the air and with Lucas's swift motion they started to rain down on the Ghouls.

"[Infernal Magic Mastery]— Infernal Misery"

The purging golden rain looked dazzling to the eye. However, make no mistake, this advanced magic that took so long to conjure, was extremely lethal and covered a large area. All the ghouls whether they be lesser ghouls or greater ghouls, all ignited into flames when the golden droplets dropped on them.

Like pouring gasoline into the fire, the flames blazed hotter and hotter the more the droplets fell. Just like the name of the magic, the scene was truly an infernal Misery.

And just like this, a large amount of Ghouls was taken out by Lucas. The remaining ones were handled by Benny and the others who used their powerful rare and ancient tiers skills to quickly sweep the ghouls.

At present, the number of enemies remaining on the battlefield was— zero... excluding the woman named Annette. On the other hand, the side of humans too suffered major losses with one of their warriors and assassins falling in the battle. By no means it could be counted as their victory.

Huffing and puffing, the group of humans looked at their last opponent, the woman standing in the air.

CLAP... CLAP... Annette clapped her hands as if congratulating them for a job well done. "That was a good fight. You managed to wipe out thirty per cent of the population of the Black town, truly marvellous"

Hearing Annette's words, everyone had the same question in their head. What was this woman saying? The never ending horde of ghouls that they just fought was only thirty per cent of the entire population?

Although they were certain that these people were the denizens of the black town, hearing it from the mouth of the woman directly, nailed the realisation in. To be able to turn the population of black town into these things, what kind of being were they dealing with?

Ignoring the perplexed looks of the humans below, Annette continued her monotonous announcement—

"Now then, look alive. It won't be any fun if you guys get tired just after this. I took the time to prepare tons of fun things for you all, so it's time for round two. I wonder how many of you will survive this round as I have a special treat for you all"

With another round of clap, hordes of ghouls larger than the previous horde, came out of the forest. They were so numerous that it was like watching a colony of ants from above. They blanketed the land and continued to pore out of the forest in a never ending fashion.

Looking at this scene, would give goosebumps to anyone. The observing human felt despair at the sight in front of them.

Just facing the previous horde, had tired them out considerably. Now facing a horde that was more than twice that big, one could see the look of anxiousness on their faces. The realisation that they might die or become a ghoul like them, was finally setting in.

That said, the true despair was not the overwhelming numbers of the lesser nor was it over the hundred greater ghouls but the three figures standing at the forefront of the army of ghouls.

All three of them were decked out in impressive looking armours that would make all the other ghouls around them paler in comparison. One of them had an axe for hand, one was wrapped in bandages and the other was holding a sword so red that it looked like it had bathed in blood.

Seeing the three figures, the group of now seven people narrowed their eyes. Being the citizen of the kingdom, there was no way they would not recognise these legends who had left their own mark in history and disappeared afterwards.

Although there were many rumours going on about them being alive and staying in the northern outlaw forest, only a small number of people had actually seen them in person. Who would have known that they would encounter these legends in person and that too as opponents?

"Axe hand Adger, Zackary the unkillable, Bloody Blade Orman... these old farts are really alive"

Even Benny Beckerman had a grim look on his face. If even the current strongest man in the kingdom had a dire look, one could imagine the seriousness of the situation.



"Oi Lucas, I can no longer guarantee that we can return back safe and soundly. You better give up on chasing after the princess. Depending on the situation we might even have to run"...

"What?" Hearing Benny's pessimistic words, Lucas was shocked. He couldn't believe that the man heralded as the strongest in the kingdom, would say something like this.

"How can you suggest to run? Didn't you use to say that an adventurer is someone who seeks romance in danger and can turn any situation around? You were the one..".

"All that was in the past. Many things have changed since then. I'm no longer an adventurer nor am I still the guild leader who once led the most powerful and prestigious guild of the kingdom. Now I am nothing but a loser who has lost everything and is currently employed under his highness to earn some spare change. What else do you expect from me?"

Benny retorted back. After he lost Godwin, Raven and some of his best people on the trial grounds, the Sea God's Trident just like the other five top guilds was almost but finished.

It was only a guild in name, what proved it still existed was the headquarters which now lay in ruins after the war between Ellsemere and Balckthorn broke out. Right now, he was nothing but his former shell.

"Dammit even though I was so close to meeting her" Lucas clenched his fist and sighed. He looked at the overwhelming numbers of the enemy and the exhausted people on his side before making his decision.

"Alright, let's leave. We can't win with our current numbers". A sound decision considering that they were severely outnumbered.

Lucas and his group tried to back towards the Air Engine. However, how could Annette who went through the trouble to prepare all of this to avenge her master, just let these people walk away?

Needless to say, she had already foreseen the situation and had prepared something beforehand. As the humans slowly retreated, their backs suddenly collided with an invisible wall that wasn't there when they came here.

"What is this?"

BANG... BANG... the wall rippled like water in a pond when attacked. However, no matter how much force they used or punch they threw, the invisible wall refused to budge.

"Everyone get back. I'll use an advance magic and force it to budge down" Lucas spoke waving his staff.

"No, wait" Just as he was about to conjure his magic, he was stopped by Benny.

"Don't bother, you can't break the wall with brute force. This is an array, to break it you need to either go for the person who laid it or destroy the formation core".

Being the most knowledgeable one amongst the lot, Benny quickly realised that the invisible wall barring their retreat was a formation.

Chapter 803- Low tier Spirits

As someone who had been adventuring for good years of his life, he had seen quite a bit of formation, especially in intermediate dungeons. As such, he quickly realised it was a formation and how to destroy it.

"I guess it's pretty much clear to everyone as to who laid this formation. That woman might have laid it down; however, she shouldn't have too much time to go for a powerful and more complex formation. As such, we have three options"

"First, is to wait for the formation to go down on its own. The formation made hastily, cannot sustain itself for long, it would soon collapse even if we don't do anything. However, it's unknown how long it would take and if we all would be able to survive till then"

In short, the first option was to wait. Who in their sane mind would just for their death? As such, the first option was a no go.

"The second option is to go for the core and destroy it. A formation like this has a glaring weakness and it is none other than its core. The core should be outside where we can see it clearly. From my guess, it should be mixed amongst the horde of ghouls"

The second option although better than the first option had a huge problem. How in the hell were they supposed to find the core amidst the horde of ghouls? The second option was basically like fighting the whole horde, something that they were trying to avoid.

As such, it was a no go too. Then the only option remaining to them was the third one.

"The third option is to attack the caster who laid the formation. If we defeat her, the formation will go down on its own"

After Benny finished talking the group deliberated for a few seconds. The onrushing hordes of ghouls were right in front of them. Leading the charge were the three old ghosts whose legends were still sung by a few minstrels to this day.

They had to decide fast. The third option seemed the most plausible; however, it involved fighting that woman. A person who could turn an entire city into her pawns that did her bidding, there was no way she was going to be an easy opponent.

Perhaps, she would be even tougher than fighting all the three legendary old ghosts together. Nonetheless, this was the only option they had or rather, they were tired of dealing with the antics of the woman and no longer wanted to be played with.

"Let's fight her"

Lucas spoke, he planted his staff on the ground, showing his stance. The others nodded in agreement while Benny grinned. Since they had to fight no matter what, why not go down fighting the most powerful opponent?

"Hehe, I have been keeping this skill for times when I had no choice but to fight for my life. Now is that time... [Mana Armour], [Mana Flow], [Ability Overlay]- [Thunder Surge]... [Lightning Suit]"

He activated one skill after another. His muscles expanded, he grew taller and his overall frame became bigger. Not only that, thunder arched his body, mixing with the mana armour around him and slowly forming a suit of sorts.

From the other's point of view, it looked like he was wearing a lightning suit.

"Hoh?"

Annette who was observing the action of her prey, was a little surprised at the technique that was activated. This technique that made the user look like they were a lightning suit was by no means just for looks, it was practically invented for combat.

All that lightning rushing into the user's body not only dramatically increased the muscle's strength, response, speed and reflexes, it even dramatically increased their defences. Not only that, but it also supercharged the body, allowing for actions and movements that would otherwise be impossible.

In other words, it was like a short duration power enhancement type technique that helped one to jump over level and fight enemies stronger than them.

"Not bad" Annette commented. With Benny activating his full power, the others didn't hold back either. Each of them used their most powerful skills or abilities that they have been saving up until now.

"I'll prepare a powerful single target spell, but me some time" saying so Lucas too started chanting.

BZZTT... leaving the rumbling of thunder in his wake, Benny charged. In just a short moment, he was already a couple of meters away from Annette. He was fast; no fast would be an understatement, he was super fast.

His charging speed wasn't the only thing that improved after donning the lightning suit, so were his attacks. In the blink of an eye, he swung his sword utilising various skills in the process.

Numerous sword auras came attacking Annette, each one powerful enough to slash through a mountain. However, facing those attacks forget about dodging, she did not even glance at them.

A transparent barrier around her took all the attacks without any problem.

"Tsk" Seeing this Benny liked his tongue, he did not give up and attacked the battier repeatedly, searching for any weakness or trick. At this moment, attacks from the other five people also came in. However, just like his won, those attacks weren't able to do anything.

"Dammit, how high her level is for her magic shield to be able to absorb all that damage? You all stop attacking her randomly and match your attacks with mine" He glanced towards his teammates and spoke.

Everyone immediately coordinated their attacks to match Benny. As a high level individual in their own right, it wasn't difficult for them to coordinate with each other even if they hadn't done it before.

The attacks that rained in afterwards, had almost perfect coordination so much so that Annette finally had to move from her place as her magic shield gave in. Using that small window of opportunity, Benny and the others pressed in with their attacks.

All sorts of skills from sword auras to magic imbued attacks targeted Annette who swiftly countered back with her own magic. Dark clouds loomed over as bolts of lightning dropped from the heavens.

The humans quickly dodged the attacks or used their defensive skills to endure. Annette could win this battle easily if she only waited and dodged their attacks. If she delayed them only for a little while, the army of ghouls would do the job for her.

However, to make them experience true despair, she couldn't just allow her prey to hold onto the false hope that they could win if they could just take her down. As such, to accomplish her goal she had to crush their spirits and their naive thoughts that they can win if they attacked her together.

Lightning poured down from the sky with a loud rumble. Considering that the attacks only came from above in a straight line, it wasn't hard for these people to dodge them. All they had to do was predict the path and get out from its radius.

Bzzttt... Bzzttt... "Hehe" ... "hehe" but then again, the attack came from Annette how could it be so simple to dodge?

"?" the humans who dodged the lightning falling from the sky, were confused by the sudden laughing sounds that came out of nowhere. When they listened to it carefully, they realised that the noises sounded like a child's laugh.

However, how could that be? Why would a child be here? "Little mischievous lightning spirits, obey my command, bend the laws of this world and give life to this lightning"

At this moment, the voice of the woman who initiated the attack, sounded out. Small glitters of purple light surrounded her, like subjects surrounding their queen, giving her an otherworldly and imposing aura.

When she extended her hand, these glitter of lights would assemble atop her palm and listen to her murmurings.

"What is she doing? Is this some kind of new attack?"

The humans discussed in confusion. Even the most experienced adventurer among them, Benny Beckerman was no exception. He had no idea what this mysterious woman was doing all of a sudden.

At a glance it looked like she was talking to the glitters of light around her; however, that was just from the outside. Perhaps, she was trying to trick them by talking to some inanimate substance to lower their guard all the while preparing for a hidden attack?

Benny quickly discarded the thought. The woman was strong enough to fight them seven on one, an exceptionally strong being like her would never respond to using hidden attacks. This could only mean that, her current actions were preparations for what's going to come next.

That said, what could her actions entail? Looking at her talking to glitters of light that surrounded and moved around mischievously, an abrupt thought appeared inside his head. His eyes immediately went wide and he couldn't help but panic a little.

"Could it be that she is preparing that.? But how? No, it shouldn't be surprising, we should have expected it. At her level, that kind of attack should be normal" His incomprehensible mutterings attracted the attention of the others around.

"What do you mean? Do you recognise the attack she is preparing?".

Benny nodded his head "Mutation magic".

Although he only uttered two simple words, the impact of those two words reverberated like thunder inside their heads.

At their level and experience, how could they not understand what those words meant? Standing as the epitome of magical power, the mutation magic is a realm where the very fabric of the forces of nature can be bent at a fundamental level.

#### Chapter 804- Low Tier Spirits (2)

Unlike your conventional magic, that is your novice, intermediate and advance, that is only able to manipulate the forces of nature according to the caster's will, Mutation magic is all about unravelling the the very threads of magic that weave this ancient arcane tapestry.

People who have entered the realm of mutation magic, are akin to architects of existence, delving into intricate codes that built the very laws of the nature. Their spells are not mere manipulations of elements; they are fundamental alterations to the blueprints of nature, rewriting the rules that govern the essence of all things.

As people who have reached the tier of advanced magic and climbed the ceiling of their talent, they understood what it meant to master mutation magic.

To comprehend Mutation Magic is to ascend to the peak of magical mastery. Few can fathom its complexities, and even fewer can wield its power without being consumed by the chaotic forces they unleash.

It requires an innate understanding of the magical underpinnings of reality, a comprehension that transcends the knowledge of ordinary mages.

The difficulty in achieving the realm of Mutation magic can be understood by the fact that even Benny Beckerman a powerful man in his own right, was never able to step any further than advanced tier nor was he able to come close to comprehend its mysteries.

Nevertheless, he had heard about and come in contact with many people who can use mutation magic. When asked about how they were able to bend the laws and do something that surpassed the understanding of the ordinary, the answer he got from them was that the element spoke to them.

It is because of this reason that when he saw Annette talking to the glitters of light around her, the first thing that came to his mind was the mutation magic.

"Everyone be careful of her attacks, do not let them touch you"

Benny warned. The seven humans wore grim faces, Lucas who was preparing his own attacks had to spare his attention to create a huge magic shield around them.

One of the most daunting aspects of Mutation Magic is its unpredictable nature. The very essence of mutation is change, and this magic is a catalyst for unpredictable metamorphosis.

At the core, it is an ability to induce profound changes in the very nature of beings and elements. It involves reshaping life, matter, and even the metaphysical aspects of the world.

In the hands of a master, Mutation Magic is a force that can reshape landscapes, redefine life, rewrite the very laws that govern reality and cause unprecedented and often irreversible transformation.

Because of all of these reasons, the seven of them were so alarmed. There was no way of knowing what the woman was going to do next. Not betraying their expectation the next action by Annette transcended all their comprehension.

Lightning began to bend, the attacks which were only falling straight and had a fixed path started going haywire. It bent in every and all direction, came from skies as well as the land and even chased after them as if they had a mind of their own.

The attacks which were previously easy to dodge, became completely unpredictable at this moment making it extremely difficult for the human to approach Annette. However, that was not the true extent of the attack.

The real trouble came when the lightning started ricocheting and bouncing off everything.

BANG... BANG... BOOOM... the group of humans could only dodge so much. Soon, more and more lightning hit them, scorching their bodies and dealing ridiculous damage. The magic shield that was put up by Lucas was only able to shield them for a few seconds before getting brutally destroyed.

"Dammit, Lucas hurry up. We won't be able to stand on our feet if this goes on for long"

Wrapped in the lightning suit, Benny was fast enough to still be able to dodge a quite few attacks. However, the same cannot be said for the others. Even if they were some of the strongest people in



the kingdom, being level 500+ and all, the attack came from a being who had reached the realm of mutation magic, someone who transcended the ordinary.

Needless to say, if they continued to suffer such damage, forget about the ghoulish army, they would be done in by the magic itself.

"I know" Lucas shouted back. At this moment, his magic was finally completed.

A vast amount of mana coagulated around him as golden flames came to life. Like a giant golden blanket, the flames quickly spread around the surroundings, contending with the lightning and eating away at each other.

"Infernal Blaze" Lucas slammed his staff into the ground and continued to provide the magic with his mana.

Soon, his face became pale and his body shuddered like a leaf in a storm. Sustaining such a large area advance magic came with its toll; nevertheless, he did not cancel his connection with the magic and continued to hold on.

The scene of two powerful wide area magic fighting for supremacy was a truly hellish and spectacular scene. Massive amounts of energy were dispersed throughout the forest from the collision and created shockwaves that could be felt from dozens of kilometres away.

"Now, attack her" Using this opportunity when she was contending with Lucas, Benny and the others rushed forward with their attacks.

50 feet...40 feet... 25 feet... 15.. they quickly closed the distance. Yet even after they got so close to her the woman still showed no signs of dodging. Alarm bells rang inside Benny's head; however, ignoring all such notions and throwing caution to the air, he and the others kept charging.

They were so near, just a little more and their weapons would be able to reach her. It took all they had just to get this far, how could they just back down after all of this? This naive thought of theirs, would be something they would come to regret in the next second.

The reason why the woman did not dodge their attack was simple, it's because there was no need to in the first place. It was all a trap to lure them in. From the beginning, it was all just a show she put on to make them believe that she was locked in a magic showdown against Lucas.

In truth, the magic collision was all but a big farce.

"Little mischievous fire spirits, obey my commands. Bend the laws of this world and give life to these flames"

As if those words were some kind of incantation, the intense magical collision going between the two powerful magic, suddenly came to a standstill. Like someone pressed the pause button, all the lightning and flames stopped rolling around.

The next second, something inexplicable happened. The infernal flames stopped contending against the lightning and instead started coordinating with it. The flames which were supposed to keep mutated lightning in check, instead started attacking them.

"AAaaarrgghh!!!" the ones who were hit by both flames and lightning squealed with the intensity of a dying pig.

The lightning was dreadful on its own, but now mixed with flames, the attack surpassed the threshold that even these battle-hardened warriors could take on. Soon, one after another they started falling down on the ground, exhausted and defeated.

"Lucas what are you doing?!! Why are you attacking us?" Just before he fell, one of the warriors shouted, aggravated at the attack by his own ally.

"It's not me... the flames, my magic... the connection with my magic has been cut" Lucas explained his situation in panic. However, this was not the time nor anyone was willing to listen to him.

What kind of bullshit was that, they all thought the same thing. The flames attacked everyone but him, because of his magic, they lost the chance they managed to get hold of after much difficulty.

"Are you saying that I attacked you? What reason could I have to do such a thing?"...

"Obviously, it is to bait us so that you can run away on your own".

It didn't take time for the fragile trust between the group, to fall apart. They started blaming one another and finding faults for the shitty situation they found themselves in.

"Enough all of you, stop blaming each other. If we fight among ourselves at a time like this, we are practically doomed. It is what our opponent wants" Benny stepped in to mediate the situation.

"I have seen it with my own eyes, it was not Lucas' fault but a ploy used by that despicable woman to break us apart"

In that split second when the woman muttered those mysterious words, he had seen the flames behaving peculiarly. To put it more exactly, he saw pairs of eyes and mouths appearing inside the flames.

It sounded crazy but it is what he saw and he himself had difficulty believing. Which is why, he did not tell the others.

Mutation magic, the epitome of magical power. Benny and the others weren't wrong in recognising that Annette was about to unleash some kind of attack that would defy the norms of the ordinary and bend the laws of the nature.

However, what they misunderstood was that Annette was not using Mutated magic instead, she was using Spirit Magic, an exclusive ability of the race of spirits.

Being a superior spirit, of course Annette knew how to use spirit magic. In these many months ever since the first big battle they had inside the dungeon Annette and the other Valkyries worked very hard to refine their abilities, and hone their skills.

Chapter 805- Low Tier Spirits (3)

Thanks to their efforts, they were now able to make optimum use of their skills and high stats without needing to rely on any powerful skills or transform into their base form. As evident by the clash between her and the group of humans who were all above level 500 with some even being level 600+.

No matter how they attacked or what trick they used, they weren't an opponent for her to become serious. The lower spirits that she summoned using her spirit magic, amalgamated with the forces of nature to wreak havoc on her enemies.

Even the magic that was conjured by her enemy, was taken over by her and turned against them. They who stood shocked at the spectacle, were just sitting ducks in front of her spirits.

The lightning spirits, low ranking spirits with their own consciousness and personality, flame spirits likewise having their own personalities and consciousness. The two spirits commanded their respective elements, using conventional magic in front of them was like asking to be humiliated.

The infernal magic that was cast by Lucas, was taken over by the flame spirits and became Annette's own attack. The lightning spirit that commanded the lightning and the flame spirit that commanded the flames, when used together, they became a force that crushed all the naive thoughts the human had about defeating her.

"Now now, pay attention here. Have you all forgotten about the ghoul army? From this point on, they shall be your opponent. Try to survive for as long as possible"

It would be all too easy for her to use flame and lightning to make quick work of these people. However, that would be no fun. 'That's right, they needed to suffer more, feel despair and struggle pathetically' Annette thought internally.

Although her pretty face did not show it because of how adept she was at controlling her facial expression and body language, but internally she was burning with the flames of revenge.

Simon was like a master, creator for her whom she had utmost reverence for, to dare to harm even this cool headed beauty who was always calm and composed, lost it.

Behind them was the formation, in front was the ghoul army led by the three legendary warriors of the kingdom and in the sky was Annette, a mage who entered the realm of mutation magic.

No matter where they looked, they were pincerred from all sides. Breaking the formation was impossible without destroying the core or the caster. The core was hidden among the ghoul army as such, defeating the caster made sense.

However, the caster was the woman flying in the air. Even with all of them joining hands, they were still not a match for her. And now that the ghould army had caught up with them, it was game over for them.

"Infernal Command— [Hellscape]" ...

"Tempest Empowerment"...

"Berserker King's Aura"...

One by one, they activated their skills and got ready for an onerous battle. Even if there seemed no hope, even if they were exhausted, they chose to struggle till the very end. And so began the hour long misery of the seven humans who struggled till their last breath.

An hour later, more than half of the ghoulish army was decimated, turned into piles of ashes that littered the ground. Large craters dotted the ground and deep ravines cut across the land for miles.

The mana in the surroundings was in haywire and there was no signs of the lush green forest being around this part of the land for miles. The hell scene was not an area that was struck by disaster but instead was man made.

The many traces boring on the ground and even present in the environment, told the tales of a fierce battle that occurred here not too long ago.

"Are you all done already? I still had a few more surprises prepared for you all you know"

Annette spoke looking down at the last three survivors. Lucas Blackwood, Benny Beckerman and a warrior named Granfield. The three of them were the strongest of the lot and thus managed to survive so far.

As for the rest, they either succumbed to the injuries they received, or lay scattered on the ground, chopped into mincemeat by Bloody Blade Zackary or became one of them. That is, became a ghoul after getting by them.

The three of them were the only ones who were able to make it so far. That said, even though they survived, it was literally as the word meant. Just one glance at their state, was enough to know that they barely hanging on.

Body dripping with blood, weapons and armour broken at several places and their dishevelled dirt laden appearance. If someone saw them right now, they would think that they were beggars instead of a powerhouse known throughout the kingdom.

"Dammit, what are these things? They don't die no matter how many times you kill them" Grimacing, the warrior named Granfield complained. He is supporting himself with his weapon, his right arm chopped off by the axe hand Adger.

"It was already bad that they were legendary criminals from the past. However, now they are even unkillable".

Just like Granfield had mentioned, the three legendary criminals of the kingdom, were proving to be a nightmarish obstacle that made them despair. Not only were they much stronger than the ones around them, but unlike the other ghouls, they were able to regenerate and use strange skills and techniques.

As long as they weren't reduced to ashes, they could regenerate from even the most gravest of wounds. That being said, turning them into ashes sounded easier said than done, after all, these three people weren't just your run off the mill ghoul but legendary criminals of the kingdom of the past.

21:33

What's more, even after being turned into a ghoul, these people were special. To list off, not only did they give off a different atmosphere than the other ghouls around them, but they could think and move as if they were still human and use their previous skills as well as those strange abilities that released a bloody light.

Even with the three of them fighting, they could barely hold one each. That was how powerful the three ghouls of the legendary criminal was.

"Dammit, I'm almost out of mana yet there doesn't seem to be any end to these damn ghouls"

Lucas cursed, he had already cast several advanced magic and dozens of intermediate tier magic in succession. Naturally, even with his talent and skills, his vast reserves of mana was coming to an end.

One could imagine what would happen of a mage who ran out of Mana. With the presence of those three unkillable bastards, the army of ghouls and the woman who was eyeing from the skies and enjoying their misery with cold callous eyes, his chances of surviving looked slim.

'Do I have no choice but to give up on Cynthia and use that skill to run' His mind raced with thoughts. He looked at his two remaining teammates who were barely hanging on and seemed like they would fall down with just the push of a breeze, before making up his mind.

It was a pity that he would have to leave them behind and escape on his own; however, the circumstances were so that it was the only option he had with him. It was not like he didn't feel any guilt leaving them behind to their fates especially when the blame for their current situation can be put entirely on his shoulder.

He was the one who brought them here and now he has to leave them behind and escape on his own.

"Lucas, don't blame yourself. The lives lost cannot be blamed entirely on you. We came here on our own, nobody could have made us come otherwise. We came because it was you. Hehe, so survive, it is better than just dying here"

As if reading through his thoughts, Benny glanced at him and grinned. In their group of nine, he was the only person Lucas was close to and saw as a friend. He was like a mentor, elder brother kind of existence for him.

"Wait what are you guys talking about? You two... you aren't making any plans of escaping without me are you" Granfield who was left out of the conversation, suspected.

"Haha, what are you afraid of Granfield? Nobody is escaping, come on I shall accompany you till the end" Benny interrupted, activating his lightning suit and running headfirst into the enemy.

Seeing that Benny was engaging the enemy, he didn't think that Lucas would leave him behind and escape. The thought disappeared from his mind and he followed behind Benny. If he was going to die, he wanted to take as many of these ghoulish bastards with him, especially that Adger who chopped his hand.

Right as the two moved, Lucas behind them started activating his skill. Space around him fluctuated and trembled intensely as spatial energy diffused around the surroundings.

Feeling the energy, Granfield who was ploughing down the ghouls, turned towards Lucas. Immediately, his face became as ugly as if he had swallowed a fly. That bastard was actually escaping on his own.

Did Benny know that? Seeing that Benny wasn't doing anything and simply looked at Lucas with a knowing nod, he finally understood what was going on.

The both of them were in it, they planned to let Lucas escape on his own. A mage who knew a space skill or spatial magic was the best escape means one could ask for.

Chapter 806- Deeply Insulting

"Bastard, take me with you" Granfield shouted rushing towards Lucas. However, his path was blocked by Axe hand Adger who came attacking him with the giant axe he had for his right hand.

On the other hand, Annette who hadn't expected Lucas to be able to actually know a spatial skill was equally surprised. She extended her hand, intending to use a spirit skill, when Benny Beckerman blitzed towards her.

"Oh no, you don't" he spoke with an excited smile on his face. The speed that he just displayed, was much much faster than before. Not only that, but the colour and appearance of his Lightning Suit was also different.

Previously if it could be said that the lightning suit made him look elegant and was blue in colour, right now, it gave him more of a brutish atmosphere and the colour of the lightning was a deep red like that of blood.

"Hehe... [Crimson Life Rupture]" Benny muttered grinning ear to ear.

In the face of his aggression, Annette simply snorted and continued casting her spell towards Lucas. Spirits of lightning and fire appeared before her, producing intense electrical surges and flames.

On her command, they moved in a helix and targeted the distant Lucas who was busy activating the spatial skill.

"I told you don't" Benny's words echoed with the rumbling of a thunder.



"[Thunder Bellow]" he moved his sword as three coiling crimson dragon thunder materialised around his sword and roared.

The two attacks collided, resulting in an intense shockwave. The powerful attack from Benny, shokingly cancelled the one from Annette causing the latter to be taken aback for a second.

Although she wasn't serious in that last attack of hers, but to be able to cancel it meant that it was at least as powerful or equal in power. She clearly remembered that this person wasn't powerful enough to dish out this level of attack before.

Which must mean that it was the result of a skill. To be able to raise one's power to such heights, it was a decent skill. However, she could also see that it had a serious drawback.

"How do you like it? This is like my last of the last resort skill that I haven't used it on anyone else before. You are the first one" Benny commented marvelling at his new look.

"Should I be honoured?" The man suddenly became chatty in his final hours. As he was the target of her revenge, she decided to humour him.

"Na, nothing of that sort, it's just that I have never activated this skill before which is why I didn't know how great it felt to be able to have this much power in one's grasp. Can you tell me one thing young lady? Is the level you are standing on, feel something like this?"

Cleaning his hands, Benny spoke excitedly. The rumbling of thunder from his new crimson suit was resounding.

"I do not know how you feel as I am standing at a much higher level than you are right now even at your current state. However, I can see that the skill you used has a very serious drawback. How long do you even have in that state"

Annette pointed out. Just like she had said, the skill that Benny used had a glaring problem and that was that it drained the user's lifeforce. As evident by his pale face and quickly shrivelling body that the lifeforce it drained was not normal, making it a one use skill before the inevitable death.

The power the skill bestowed to the user was really great; however, the fact that it took their life force in exchange made the skill less than decent in that aspect.

"Heh, you easily saw through my skill, I would expect no less from someone as strong as you. It is as you say, with the lifeforce I currently have, I do not have much time. Probably a couple of minutes before I croak. However, it is enough time for me to keep you busy. If burning up my life can help a young man with a bright future escape from this hell hole, then I say it's worth it"

Just like a flash of lightning, Benny executed numerous sword skills each accompanied by three coiling crimson thunder dragons. Now that he has executed his last resort skill, [crimson life rupture] which converted his lifeforce into strength, his speed as well as his attacks became much more powerful than before when he was simply using the Lightning Suit.

In this state, his level which was around 638 was displaying the strength of warriors around level 700.

"Buying time by talking are we? Hmph, it's useless no matter what you do, no one can escape from here?" Annette quickly saw through her opponent's ruse and activated her skill.

It was true that she didn't expect someone of Lucas' level to be able to know a spatial skill. Nevertheless, even if they knew a spatial skill, they were not getting out of here. The reason for that was because she possessed the bane of all the skills and magic, the [Disruption] skill.

Be it a skill or magic, one requires mana to activate it. The [Disruption] skill which sends all the mana into the surrounding into a frenzy thus interrupting all skills and magic was the ultimate counter.

The moment, Annette activated her disruption skill, it was as if the sky had changed colour, the entire area became a world of monotone. All the mana in the surrounding was pushed away and the entire area for dozens of meters, became a mana void zone.

With all the mana gone, it was impossible to cast any magic or skill per se here. The spatial skill cast by Lucas' was naturally interrupted. The intense fluctuations of space around him suddenly became stagnant and the coordinates he set for his teleportation went all wrong and the skill was collapsing in front of his face.

"Not good!!!" Seeing that the spatial gate he just formed might collapse at any moment, he made up his mind and did the unthinkable. Clenching his hands, he jumped into the unstable gate.

Usually, jumping into an unstable spatial gate with its coordinates all around the pale, was extremely dangerous and a foolish endeavour. No one in their sane mind would ever think of doing something like this. After all, the unstable spatial energy inside the spatial gate might very well tear the person apart into uncountable pieces if something goes wrong.

However, Lucas who was stuck between a rock and a hard place, had no other choice. He chose to believe in the faint chance of success and dived head first.

Luckily for him, the spatial gate didn't tear his body apart and he was able to successfully teleport. However, the bad news was that with the coordinates all around the place, the area he was teleported to, was not very far away from here.

In fact, he did not even leave the area of perception of that woman. Lucas could tell Annette locking into his presence instantly after he teleported here.

"Tsk, one of the pests got away. Never mind, nobody can get away with her being here." Back at the battlefield, Annette clicked her tongue in annoyance seeing that one of her targets of revenge got away.

"Hehe, so Lucas got away huh? That's good, now than I shall do my part too. This shall be the last battle of my life. Why don't we make it more exciting" Benny smiled, his eyes glowing with a fierce light.

After he lost his best pupil back inside the Forbidden Grounds and his guild was destroyed, he was always looking for a place to die. However, as an adventurer, committing suicide was unacceptable for him nor was dying in any other way.

His pride would only allow him to fall against an opponent who could best him in a duel. And finally today, he met an opponent like that. The woman who called herself Annette was the only opponent who could do him that honour.

Since the very moment he laid eyes on her, he realised the vast strength difference between them. Call it an adventurer's gut feeling or instinct but having gone through his fair share of adventures, he could vaguely predict how powerful one was based on just their presence and without even needing to rely on the [Analysis] skill.

It was for this reason that he knew none of them would survive the moment she appeared. That's right, he decided this place would be his deathbed and he would die here valiantly, killed by an opponent that he recognised.

However, reality didn't seem to play as he wished. From the corner of his eyes, he saw a couple of figures materialise from the shadows and go after Lucas at the orders of the woman.

Judging by their presence they were all... stronger than him!!

What was going on? Where did all these people come from? Where did Her Highness the princess find them? While he was in a state of daze at the shock of his life that he received today, Annette clapped her hands disrupting his thoughts.

"Now, now... I'm sure you are currently feeling full of yourself from all that boost in power. So I have decided to let the three of them be your opponent".

On Annette's indication, the three ghouls of the legendary criminals of the kingdom, stepped forward. One of them, namely axe hand Adger was even holding the beheaded head of the warrior named Granfield.

Chapter 807- Deeply Insulting (2)

It appeared that at some unknown point in time when he was not paying attention, Granfield had died. Killed by the opponent renowned for being called the head cutter a long time ago.

The other two, bloody blade Orman and Zackary the Unkillable weren't your easy picks either. With the three of them as his opponent, even Benny who was under the effects of his skill won't be able to take it easy.

That said, although the legendary criminals that once shook the kingdom with their cruel actions, weren't bad to be his final opponents, this was still deeply insulting.

"What do you mean? Even after I activated [Crimson life ruture] you still won't fight me. Are you looking down on me?"

Benny hollered enraged at the fact that the opponent would not take him seriously even after he used his last resort to increase his power at the cost of his life.

"That's right, it does not matter to me what you had in mind or what you expected. You will die a dog's death here at the hands of these three. This is my way of exacting revenge on you for what you did to my master" Annette lost control of her emotions for a second there and blurted out a few things.

"You master?!!" Benny asked confused at the new information that he received "What do you mean? This was all a revenge for you?".

As hard as he thought, he couldn't figure out who the woman was talking about.

"Hmph, it's his matter and I'm sure he wouldn't want me to butt in. However, even then I cannot simply forgive you for what you did back then. I will just ask for master's forgiveness later" Saying so, she gestured with her finger and the three immediately jumped at Benny.

"Kihihi, I have been waiting to fight the strongest man in the kingdom. Benny Beckerman, I have heard all about your feats and achievements. Today let me experience for myself if all those tasks that I heard were all just baseless rumours or the truth" Zackary the unkillable spoke.

"Hey, who told you that you can have the headstart? Benny Beckerman is my opponent" Bloody Blade Orman added.

"Get aside you two, let me handle him" Axe hand Adger rushed past first. Seeing the three talk and converse like humans, Benny was taken aback for a moment. Nonetheless, he still perfectly parried the attack that came from Axe hand.

They can speak? But how? This was another one of the uncountable shocks that he received today.

"Heh, you blocked that huh? How about this then? [Bloody Fountain Chop]" The axe hand of Adger shone with a bloody red glow before spurting out a fountain of blood.

The speed at which the blood came out, was so fast that it easily sliced through the ground, boulder and anything around it. Benny was forced to swiftly dodge the attack. Thankfully because of his extreme speed, it was nothing too difficult for him.

"There is no mistaking it, they are actually speaking. But how can that be?"

The ghouls he had fought all this time, although some had the ability to think and use skills like humans, none of them had the ability to speak. If they did, a few of his teammates who turned into ghouls after getting bitten would have said something or recognised them.

However, when they turned into a ghoul, forget about seeing any human emotion, all that was reflected from their eyes was pure unsatiable hunger for human flesh. Benny noticed that the last point was common in all ghouls whether they be Greater Ghouls or lesser ghouls.

This was also the reason why he thought that when one turns into a ghoul they lose all their human self and turn into a being of sorts that was no different than a monster.

However, the three in front of them lacked any such desire or maybe they did but were able to perfectly handle it. Did that mean that they were special in a way being able to talk and retain their previous memory and all?

Think as much as he may, he would never be able to figure out the fact that the three he was fighting, were no mere ghoul but a Vampire Neonate. Vampires who are at the lowest ranks of the vampire hierarchy.

Be that may, even if the three of them were only the lowest ranking vampires, there was still a large difference in strength between them and a ghoul.

A ghoul was just a servant, one that could be mass produced and used as a meat shield by a vampire. They do not possess any of the powerful abilities that a vampire does nor can they regenerate their wounds.

Whereas, a vampire neonate is an actual vampire possessing all the dreadful skills that made their race such a menace. Being at the bottom rungs, the Vampire Neonates are the hands and feet of the other higher ranking vampires.

What's more, the three of them were already pretty strong. Now after becoming a vampire, it was only natural that they became even stronger.

If it was just one or at max two of them he was confident that he could handle it. However, with the three of them joining hands, even he was hard pressed to defeat them.

Although he was called the strongest man in the kingdom, it was only now. In their time, Adger, Zackary and Orman had all reached a level that wasn't too far away from him. Naturally, they could match him if they worked together even if he was under the effects of the skill that he could only use once in his life to increase his strength.

And then there was the ridiculous endurance they had. No matter how many times they took damage or how grave of a wound they suffered they quickly healed themselves and sprang up.

In front of his eyes, Benny saw Adger whose axe hand that he had chopped off, dig his fangs into a nearby ghoul and casually reattach his hand.

It was not only Adger, Zackary and Orman did the same every once in a while when they suffered grievous wounds.

[Thirst] an exclusive ability of the vampires and the other races associated with them. It gives them the power to constantly heal their wounds and regenerate from their injuries. On the other side, the downside of this skill is that while in possession of this ability, one would have an insatiable hunger and crave blood intensely.

Anyways, thanks to this unfair ability they could easily keep up with Benny. The latter despite knowing the fact that their ridiculous regeneration stemmed from the blood they drank could do nothing to stop them. After all, there was an army of ghouls around them.

How many times can he even stop them? At this moment, Benny finally realised he wouldn't even be able to get the kind of death he desired.

The fight between Benny and the three vampires although was a spectacle and feast for eyes, didn't last long. After a few minutes as soon as the duration of the skill ended, unable to support himself any longer, Benny fell down from the sky and lay on the ground back first.

With his bones sticking out of his skin, sunken eyes and body that looked like it had aged very much, he seemed to be at the death's door. All of his lifeforce had been drained, he would die even if nobody killed him.

Looking at that state of his, the cold callous eyes of Annette slowly smiled. She finally managed to exact the revenge on the person who made her master go through all that difficulty and made him experience despair in the truest of senses.

She saw his miserable and pathetic state and called the three vampires back. In his last moment, she didn't even offer him the luxury of his opponent finishing him.

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Huff... huff...inside the Norther Outlaw Forest Lucas was running. His breath was ragged and his clothes dirty. As a mage, the stats that he focused on was mostly Magic and Endurance. As a result, he was lacking in other aspects and tasks such as running for a long period of time was an uphill battle for him.

If he was so bad at physical tasks, why was he running and not using his magic to teleport away?

The answer was that he was being hunted. Currently not too far behind, were a couple of shadows who were silently tailing him. From their appearance, it doesn't seem like they were ghouls; no, on the contrary, they appeared more like Demi humans.

Everything around him was so messed up that Lucas didn't even question how and what the demi humans were doing here. He was all too busy running for his life.

The demi humans might not be ghouls; however, they weren't allies either. Although from the situation it might seem like they were simply trailing him but make no mistake. The moment he tries to fly or use his spatial magic, he would be shot down by their attacks mercilessly.

Why were they stopping him from teleporting away? Lucas had an idea though it was too frightening that he didn't want to think about it. He didn't want to die, there were still a lot of things he wanted to achieve.

He was a genius and had the potential to rise much higher, 'that being' himself said so. He had to get out of here, he had to survive no matter what.

Chapter 808- Onwards to Castledor



The air engine was the other way where that dreadful woman and the army of ghouls was. He has no choice but to give up on it, which left him with only one choice and that was to use his spatial skill.

However, to use this skill he needed a lot of time and focus all of his attention on the activation. As such, he needed to open some distance from his pursuer and hide somewhere. And so, Lucas kept on running.

When he walked past the tall thickets and appeared before a rocky outcrop, all of his hopes was smashed away and the most frightening thought he had been refusing to think about all this time, came true like an omen.

He was surrounded, standing before him was none of than the dreadful woman who wiped out his entire team and the army of ghouls she commanded. The three legendary criminals were also there, or should he say two. One of them was missing.

"Can you leave this one to me? Since I was the one who started it, it's only normal that I should finish it".

Just as he was wondering who she was talking to, a reply came from behind him.

"As you wish. Miss Maybell only told us to track him and stop him from escaping".

It was the demi humans, at some point, they had easily caught up with him.

"Now then, it ended up taking more time than I thought but shall we finish this?" Saying that, she set her dogs or the two criminals per se lose on him.

"Why are you... no, why is she doing this?!!" in his last moments, he could only ask so. His question received no answer and soon, his Lucas Blackwood's life ended there.

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Inside a pure white room that was completely empty, a silhouette suddenly opened his eyes. The appearance of the figure couldn't be seen as they were radiating an intense golden light. Nevertheless, from their bodyline, one could figure out that they were female.

"What is it Domiel?" the figure spoke.

At this moment, another voice rang inside the room "Paraclete of Light, I am here to report that one of the seeds we put the stigma on has died"...

"All mortals must die someday, death is something that cannot be escaped. Its just one seed, why are you so flustered?"

"Yes, it as you say, it's inevitable for some seeds to die before they fully mature. However, the cause of this seed's death raises a little concern"...

"Oh?! How so?"

The voice replied "The one who imprinted the Stimga on that seed was none other than me. When the seed died, I felt an ominous and foreign energy from the revelation. I'm afraid that it might be the signs of the out.."

Domiel was just about to speak something when the figure covered by the golden light stopped him.

"Do not speak that name. I understand your concern, I will bring it to 'her' notice when I meet her".

"I am grateful for the Praclete's understanding"

With that the voice of Domiel excused himself. Once he left, the room fell into silence once again. The figure covered by the golden light continued to stare ahead blankly for some time before muttering a few words.

"If it's really as Domiel said, then the world is in danger again".

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Back inside the wagon, Annette recounted the events to Cynthia.

"So even Benny Beckerman is now gone huh" the princess sighed.

"Are you regretting your orders Your Highness?" Annette asked noticing a tinge of disappointment in her expression.

"It's not like that. I am aware that as someone who was in the opposite faction, he was a threat that needed to be taken out. It was unavoidable; however, thinking that we lost one of the strongest men in our kingdom, I cannot help but lament a little" Cynthia explained.

"Even if he was someone like a guardian to the Kingdom, he needed to die for the offence he committed against master" Annette's voice was cold. She had no sympathy for anyone who tried to go against her master.

"You are right, he did indeed go against the dungeon. As someone who is now also part of that dungeon, I cannot think like that".

This was the deal, in exchange for his aid, everything that she owned, her life, soul, possession and even the kingdom, would become his. She had made her decision after thinking about it carefully.

"We are nearing the area, the battlefield should soon come into view" Just as Annette had said, the lineup of wagons stopped after travelling for a little while.

CLACK... CLACK, the footsteps of a person came near and the guard commander's voice rang out.

"Princess, there are signs of battle nearby. We sent a couple of our people to go ahead and investigate the area. There might still be danger around, so please be careful".

Cynthia opened the door and stepped out.

"Your Highness" Her retainers bowed.

"I wish to go there and see the area where the battle took place with my own eyes" She spoke.

"But your highness the place is dangerous. Who knows, the ones who fought there might still be around" Bret the old assassin, raised his concern.

"Don't worry, we have the greatest force in the kingdom with us right now. Do you really think anything that is out there can still threaten us?" Cynthia's words silenced everyone.

It was as she said, the group of people who they were travelling with were all elite adventurers and powerhouses of the kingdom. All of their level were above 400 with some even reaching level 500.

With a line up like this, one can easily destroy a city. How can there still be something in this northern outlaw forest that can still threaten them? And even if there was something, with the woman beside Her Highness, it would still not be a problem. After all, the woman was the subordinate of that being.

"If you must insist, then we will accompany you".

With that Cynthia and the others made her way over to the vanguard of the group. A few meters away, the aftermath of a destructive force lay scattered across the forest floor.

Broken branches, displaced rocks, and upturned soil marked the aftermath of a recent clash, evidence that something powerful had recently transpired here. The air still carried the faint scent of magical residue and the turbulent mana hinted at the nature of the battle that had unfolded.

Standing at the site of the destruction the figures of Blake and the others could be seen. With their guards up and still maintaining the formation, they carefully scanned the place.

"Any insight Blake?" Cynthia asked approaching the group.

"Your Highness, this place is..." Blake was just about to say that this place was dangerous and she ought not to move around here carelessly when he remembered who was with her. His eyes moved towards Annette who followed the princess like a shadow before quickly shifting away.

He did not even realise that she was gone from their side, fought a battle and quickly returned back without anyone even noticing it.

"Not much Your Highness, we are still investigating the place. However, from the leads we have found so far, it's clear that this was not the doing of some clash between two monsters but something that was caused by people. I cannot give you numbers but from the footsteps we have seen, there seemed to be quite plenty of them" Blake answered surveying the site with a solemn look in his eyes.

"I see, do we know who are the people responsible for it?" Cynthia asked feigning ignorance.

"Not yet, however, I have sent a few assassins to investigate the area around here. If they find anything they would report back to us... oh! Speak of the devil" Just as he was saying that, the assassin he sent to scout the area, returned back.

"Sir Blake, we have a report. Two kilometres south from here, we spotted an Air Engine parked on top of a small mountaintop"...

"An Air Engine" Blake raised his brows not expecting an Air Engine to pop up in the report.

"Who is driving it? who all are inside?"...

"The Air Engine seems to be abandoned, there doesn't seem to be anyone around" the assassins reported.

"Hmm, could it be the ones who fought here, the people from the air engine? If so then where did they go?" Wyot muttered, generating more questions inside everyone's head.

"There is no point dwelling over something we have no clue about. How about we go and see that Air Engine, maybe we will find some more clues there" Cynthia suggested.

Everybody nodded their head, given their objective and their lives at stake, they needed to investigate every factor and element at play here. If it affected them, they needed to learn about it or eliminate it if it threatened them.

As reported by the assassins, the Air Engine had no one manning it, nor was there anyone to be seen around, it looked totally deserted.

"Considering the size of this air Engine, it should be capable of carrying around 10-12 people. I have looked around the cabin and the engine, there doesn't seem to be any problem with it. Heck, it's in tip top condition, I don't see any reason to abandon such a fine ship" Wyot who was somewhat knowledgeable about the mechanics of the Air Engine, said after examining it.

"If it's not broken, then where did the people who board it go?"...

"Don't know, but could it be that they were all killed?"...

"Don't say something so ominous".

#### Chapter 809- Night of the Raid

While the adventurers discussed among themselves, sometimes saying stupid things that incited a laugh, Blake turned towards Cynthia and asked the question that everybody was missing.

"Your Highness, do you recognise the crest inscribed on the Air Engine?"...

"It's the symbol of Duke Montford's" The latter nodded her head. "If it's their ship, it must mean that they are here".

It was not a good sign that the Duke's Air Engine was found here. After all, if his transport was here, it meant that the person himself was also...

"Duke Montford and the first prince are still inside Castledor. I have received a report this morning that the duke's exclusive Air Engine was stolen in the darkness of the night this morning" as if reading everyone's thoughts, Annette stated.

The report that she gave everyone was not false, in fact, it was entirely true just that she omitted a few important points from the report.

So that was the case, everyone nodded their head. At least one mystery was solved, that said even though the duke himself or the prince was not on board, it still remained unknown who stole the Air Engine and why did they bring it here.

"I leave the others in charge of finding any clues as to who were the people on board. Blake, you and your group will make sure the Air Engine is ready to sail again. Since they abandoned it, I shall very well put it to work again"

Cynthia handed out orders. As someone who knew the truth of the matter and still acted oblivious, she didn't want to waste much time searching after ghosts. As such, she gave the job to the other people and tasked Blake and the others with things that were more important right now.

Although Blake had some questions and wanted to still investigate the people who arrived with this Air Engine, he nevertheless carried the orders that were given to him.

The other adventurers also did the same and carefully carried out their tasks. Soon the entire place was thoroughly scanned and not even a single trace of the people who arrived here with the Air Engine could be found, leading the adventurers to believe that they either perished fighting each other or were far away from here.

The latter being the case was unlikely which meant the former had to be the case, given the scene of devastation that they had all witnessed just a few moments ago.

"Hmm, did those people really perish fighting among themselves? In that case, why did they even come here?"

Blake mused, sitting inside the cabin of the Air Engine. Since according to Wyot the airship was perfectly fine to take flight again, he had been going around searching the place for any clues that could give him information about the people on board.

"Give up Blake, stop trying to do something that Her Highness barred you from" While he was deep in thought, Wyot approached him and tapped his shoulder.

21:38

"What do you mean barred me from?" Her Highness gave him the task to get the Air Engine ready not barred him from doing anything.

"Do you really think that? If so then let me ask, why did Her Highness give you the task to examine the Air Engine when I have already inspected it?" Wyot questioned.

"Isn't it because she wants to use the Air Engine? Sieging Castledor city would become much easier if we used the Air Engine to drop some of our elite adventurers inside the city continuously" Blake answered after thinking for a while.

"You are right, however, do you think she would put some of her best men into manning the Air Engine when there might be far greater danger like for example our plan leaking to the enemy, or the people who fought here were perhaps after her life? Do you really think the princess we know would take such risks?" Wyot continued to explain what he thought.

"Do you want to know what I think? My guess is that the reason why she is so composed about all of this is because she already knows what happened here"...

"What?!! That can't be..." At those words, Blake reacted with surprise. There is no way the princess would hide such a crucial information from them.

"It's not impossible if you think about it. From the moment we met Her Highness to till now, all the greatest obstacles in our path seem to magically disappear. It was the same case back in the tower town when we went inside the hideout of the criminal organisation and even now. I believe that the reason why Her Highness is not talking about it and instead giving us some other tasks to occupy us is because it involves those people".

It was clear to Blake who Wyot meant by those people. That's right it made sense now that he highlighted it. If it were those people, he wouldn't put it beyond them to instantly take care of any people or pursuers who might be after Her Highness.

Perhaps, it was really as Wyot said, the people who were on board this ship were after her highness and the devastation around the area was the result of a fierce battle between her highness' force and the enemies.

If so, it was understandable why she couldn't talk about it and instead was diverting their attention into doing something that might look less important than searching for the clues around.

It was because the other adventurers were searching for ghosts, people who no longer existed. The ones who came down with this air engine were already taken care of and no matter how much the adventurers searched the place, they won't be able to find anything.



"I see" Blake nodded his head in understanding. Sometimes he forgets because Wyot always acts goofy; however, the latter had a pretty good head on his shoulders.

Not far away from them, standing behind a wall was a pretty woman with long black hair and pale skin. She had a gloomy atmosphere surrounding her and always acted apprehensive and anxious.

Who could the woman be other than Emma? At this moment, her eyes which were covered by her long bangs looked at the conversing Blake and Wyot before she left silently. The two who did not even sense her presence were unaware that they narrowly dodged a bullet.

A while later, Cynthia and her forces gathered near the air engine. She stood in front, while a black haired beauty with a spectacle sitting on her nose, followed a step behind her.

"How goes the investigation? Were you able to find anything relevant?" She addressed the adventurers.

The ones who were tasked with investigating the place shook their heads. They had been at it for over a couple of hours now. Yet no matter how much they searched or tracked any trails they found, they couldn't find the people who were the cause of the disturbance nor any trace. It was almost as if they all perished in the battle.

"I see, if we can't find any clues, then it cannot be helped. We will proceed as per plan. The group will march straight through the forest. Blake you and your team will be responsible for manning the air engine. Take a few mages and tie a few wagons to the Air engine to carry them ahead"

"We will use this strategy to increase our speed. As some of you mentioned before this is a raid, and speed is of essence. If we can use the Air engine to increase our speed, we will do so. All the others will march like usual".

With Cynthia's instructions, the group started trudging forward. With the aid of the Air Engine carrying the wagons back and forth, the journey which should have taken one month was cut short into just one week.

And thus, one week later, standing between the borders of the Northern Outlaw Forest and the Castledor city, the raid team laid their eyes on their objective. Fortified by tall and sturdy looking walls and ramparts, the city in the distance was worthy of its name, Castledor City.

Its walls that stood since the time of its founding had repelled swarms of monsters coming off from the northern outlaw forest numerous times and looked the very definition of impenetrable.

On top of the walls, one could even see the ancient magic cannons whose technology had long since become outdated. These magic cannons which needed more than five people to operate it, can even penetrate through the toughest defence of monsters around level 200.

Other than that there was also numerous barracks and embrasures that could be seen around the wall. No matter who it was or how many times they looked at the city, they would no doubt be impressed every time by its sheer grandeur and imposing look.

A long stretching highway that spanned across the ground like the roots of a tree, connected the city to various parts of the dukedom. One such road connected the city to the Northern Outlaw Forest.

Though since this road that connected the dukedom to the rest of the northwestern region of the kingdom such as the city of Mountend, Morgress and all, it had been blocked on orders of his royal highness, the first prince, Alstin Ellesmere.

The road which hadn't had any visitors for months now, was covered with moss and wild grass. If a merchant who was used to travelling regularly from the north westen part of the kingdom to the city saw this, they would never be able to guess that it was the highway that connected the two regions.

#### Chapter 810- Night Of The Raid (2)

"Heh, it looks like duke montford's duchy is doing good. Well, considering the fact that they sent all the injured, destitute and the old towards the northwestern region, I guess it is to be expected"...

"I bet that prince is sitting in his Brobdingnagian chair inside his castle at this moment, enjoy the lofty services that common folks won't even dream of"...

"Aren't we here precisely for that, to light a fire under his ass? Let's bring that stupid prince who dreams about becoming a king, down"...

The adventurers smirked looking at the distant city, thriving and flourishing at the expense of other people and regions. Not long from now, they were going to raid it and plunge the city in despair.

"Your Highness, when should we commence our attack?" Blake and the others stood in front of their respective teams and asked.

Cynthia observed the thriving metropolis in the distance as if wanting to engrave it in her memories for the last time before closing her eyes. The next time she opened them, there was a resolute and ruthless light in those eyes.

Those eyes that made their resolution were not just any ordinary eyes, but the eyes of a ruler who had to be cruel and heartless to her own people for the sake of her own people.

"We will commence the attack at midnight today. You all have a few hours, rest all you want right now. After some time, you will have to fight people who are on your side. Even if they are soldiers who are just doing their job, civilians or your relatives, if they stand in your way, slay without any hesitation"

"Those who can't steel their heart to the cruel slaughter that is about to begin, might as well stay behind. I want only those people to follow me who can obey my order without any question"

Cynthia spoke in an assertive and sharp tone that left no room for any argument. From this point on, no disobedience will be allowed. The group of adventurers, even though they had no proper training, etiquette or manner, saluted towards the princess to the very best of their ability.

And so, on the orders of Her Royal Highness the Princess, the adventurers rested their travel worn bodies for the upcoming big battle. Since they were at the borders of the northern outlaw forest with plenty of greeneries and foliage, they were perfectly hidden from the sentries on the wall.

In fact, even if they were spotted, there would be no problem as the sentries were all turned into ghouls by Theodore's and Myabell's kindred. The entire northwestern part of the wall had been taken over by the enemies and the people of the city nor the nobles had any idea.

They were still living out their daily lives going on about their usual activities. They would only come to know about the intruders much later when the bell from the southern wall sounded the alert and a wall of fire, higher than the walls of the city itself encases an entire district.

Inside the castle, Alstin read a report from his subordinate and immediately crumpled the parchment of paper in his hand in anger.

"Dammit, so aside from the southern nobles, even the western nobles have thrown their lots with the enemy. Those contemptuous bastards, I will definitely behead them all".

BANG... he kicked away the chair he was sitting on.

"Why, why do these things only happen to me. On top of being surrounded by enemies from all sides, they are now marching towards here. Dammit, where are Lucas and Benny at a time like this?".

The subordinate hesitated before replying "I believe they took His Grace's Air Engine to go in search of the princess".

Alstin turned around, his eyes glaring at the subordinate "You think I don't know that? What I want to know is where are they now exactly and can we still not get in touch with them through the transmission conch?".

It has been more than a week since Lucas and the others left. Considering the fact that they were travelling with an Air Engine, even if their destination was to the far northwest, a week was enough time to make several trips back and forth.

So why were they not back yet? Worse, he couldn't even reach them through the transmission conch, which made their status uncertain.

"Could it be that they really found my sister? Were the reports really true? If so then the fact that they are not returning is because they betrayed me and joined my sister's side? It is Lucas we are talking about, I will not put it beyond him" Alstin paced around as several worst scenarios played out in his head.

"It could also very well be possible that they took the Air Engine and ran away, betraying me. Yes, yes... it might be the truth".

Away from him, kneeling on the ground and watching Alstin's demented behaviour, was the subordinate. A wicked grin played across their lips and their eyes glowed a strange red. However, before the prince could even notice, they quickly concealed it.

It could be said that ever since the invasion of blackthorn and the fall of the capital, things were starting to go gravely wrong for Alstin. The cynical side of his also kept on becoming worse day by day until he was completely grasped by paranoia.

The circumstances played a large part in Alstin's transformation; however, a large part of it was because of the subordinate's interference. A creepy greyish black energy slowly seeped into the room and quietly and coiled around the first prince's body and entered him.

"Your Highness, if Lucas and Benny have betrayed you, simply cut them off. The same goes for the incompetent sister of yours. Once you become the king, you can simply send them to the gallows and punish their insubordination. You are the only one worthy to rule this land, you can do anything you want, those who don't follow you are the traitors, your enemy. Simply cast them away..."

"That's right, I am the only one worthy, the ruler.."

Just as the subordinate was in the midst of brainwashing and coercing the first prince's mind, a soldier hurriedly knocked on the door.

"Your Highness, I have an urgent report".

Immediately, the effects of the brainwashing disappeared and the prince snapped out of his stupor. The greyish black energy also faded from around his body.

"What was I doing?" Alstin muttered under his breath. The subordinate was gone and he couldn't remember anything he was doing up until now.

"Enter" ...

"Yes"

On his command, the soldier entered in. Alstin immediately recognised the soldier as one of the men manning the wall.

What were they doing here? What's more, given how much the soldier was out of breath and sweating, he must have run all the way here. It had to be very urgent.

"What's wrong? Give your report?"..

"Yes"

As he had expected the report was extremely important and concerned him and the entire city.

"We are being attacked? Who is it? Is it the Army from Balckthorn? No that is impossible. It would take more than two months time to get here from the capital and that too by carriage at full speed. Could it be that they flew over here using the Air Engine? But if they did, I'm sure my spies would have sent some reports over"

Alstin bit his thumb as he pondered in panic.

"It's not Blackthorn's army who is besieging us, Your Highness" The soldier shook his head.

"Then could it be the nobles who have thrown their lots with the enemy? Of course, it's them, if anyone who can reach Castldor so soon, it's them"...

"It's not them either"...

"Hm? Then who could it be?"

If it's not the Blakcthon army which was occupying the capital nor the nobles who changed their alliance, then who would attack him at this hour.

"That is..." the soldier looked a little perplexed himself "From the flag the enemy is flying, we reckon that it's the insignia of the Serene Palace".

As soon as the soldier said those words, Alstin's pupils dilated to their limits.

"Did you just say that the enemy was flying the symbol of Serene Palace?" Wanting to make sure that he heard right, he asked again.

The soldier nodded. "Impossible, she should have died back inside the dungeon. How... how can she be here? No, I can't allow this, nobody can take my place as the king. I am the only true ruler of this land"

While the prince was busy indulging in his paranoia, the soldier interjected "Your Highness what is your command?"..

"No matter if it's Aiden or Cynthia, those who stand in my way are my enemies. Hmm, first I need to ascertain the truth of the matter. Contact the northern garrison and ask them about the situation around the wall..."

"About that, we have lost all contact with the northern garrison. We believe that the enemy has already taken control of the northern side of the wall".

SILENCE~ As soon as the soldiers spoke those words, an unsettling silence descended onto the room. It stayed for a couple of seconds before being broken by Alstin who garbbed the soldier by their armour.

"What did you say?!!" His voice distorted by anger, he bellowed.

"It is as you heard Your Highness, we can't contact the northern garrison" the soldier repeated.

"Bastard, do I pay you all for no reason? You can't even do a single task. All you had to do was guard the wall and sound the alarm when you spot anything suspicious. Is it not why you are stationed there?"...

"Yes"...