

D. of Pride 981

Chapter 981- Unexpected Interference

Before they could fully react, the human soldiers and mercenaries, descended upon them in a relentless wave.

The Viscounts' powerful stats and magic made them formidable opponents under normal circumstances. However, even a Demon Viscount bleeds when overwhelmed by sheer numbers and caught off guard.

Magic cast, flames swirled, barriers deployed and all sorts of manoeuvres were conducted. Even while spilling blood and seeing the comrades in front of them die, the human forces still progressed forward and soon their blades reached the neck of a demon viscount.

With the weight of the numbers slowly chipping down at their defences, one demon viscount soon fell down. This moment turned out to be the turning point for the human army.

The Demon Nobles who were seen as the incarnation of power and magic were finally brought down and that too by none other than an ordinary soldier. The amount of boost it gave to their morals could be imagined.

While the human army's motivation was at its peak, the demon army's spirit was at the dirt quite literally.

Not only was their ace in the hole stopped and destroyed without achieving any effect, but even the top officers, the adjutants of the Demon Earl Melkan were being taken down one after another.

Even for these monsters who are driven by instincts, they had enough sense to realise their situation. The momentum of the battle had shifted completely. The demons' ferocity dulled, their once-relentless march slowed, and hesitation crept into their ranks.

Usually, in a situation like this, it was the responsibility of the leader to rally the troops, restore order, and reignite the fire of battle. However, Melkan was no leader and lacked all the qualities of one.

He stood frozen at the backlines, his face contorted in a mixture of rage and disbelief.

As one would expect, the demon army crumbled running in any and all direction making them easy prey.

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"He should soon be making his move" Watching the chaos ensue, Simon muttered. His eyes darted towards the backlines of the demon army where a single Demon Earl stood.

With his ace in the hole destroyed, army in shambles and adjutants defeated, he must be getting quite anxious. This was a chance for him to rack up some contributions and raise his level in the Demon Lord's faction.

Given Melkan's character, he would join the battle himself to salvage the situation.

"Now then, it's going exactly as planned..."

He was in the midst of his internal monologue when his instincts suddenly rang alarm bells at him and his eyes couldn't help but dart towards the direction where he felt that strong sense of suppression from.

"No way..."

There high above the clouds, two figures floated, their presence suffocating even at a distance. One of them was a familiar face—Demon Duke Vordanaz, his regal, imposing form unmistakable. But the other...

Simon's blood ran cold "Why is he here...?"

BOOOM... Before he could fully process the implications, the battlefield was shaken by a deafening explosion. The explosion tore through the fortress, sending debris flying and creating a massive mushroom cloud.

A portion of the wall collapsed under the assault, sending plumes of smoke and ash billowing into the sky. Kindles of fire spread rapidly, consuming everything in their path.

The crackle of flames and the groans of crumbling stone filled the air as Melkan stood in the heart of the demon army, his hands still raised and glowing with the remnants of mana.

That attack earlier was from him. Seeing the army he got from the Demon duke get annihilated like that, he was finally forced to step onto the battlefield himself.

To make an example and to remind the humans what they were up against, he used a large AOE intermediate tier magic to get things started.

However, it might seem that he had underestimated the abandoned fortress the human repaired a little too much since even after receiving his attack, it was still standing and only a small portion of the wall crumbled.

"Doesn't matter, I have decided to kill them all myself" Enraged and fearful of what was to come for him if he lost the war, he took a step and jumped into the heart of the battle.

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Cough... Cough.. inside the fortress, soldiers and mercenaries sprawled on the ground covered in dust, coughing as they tried to prop themselves up.

Just moments ago, they had been manning the walls, shields and spears in hand, valiantly holding the demon army at bay. Then came the explosion—a blinding light that overwhelmed their senses.

Now, they lay amidst the rubble, disoriented and struggling to breathe.

Dravik staggered to his feet, his face smeared with dirt and blood. He looked around at the soldiers and commanded with a hoarse voice.

"Get up! This isn't over! Regroup and form ranks!"

The tall wall that they were standing on, the defensive line that had been stopping the monster, was now gone. However, they still had to hold them down here. That said, it might have been too hasty for him to say that as another shockwave hit the fortress.

This time it was... the commander of the demon force himself.

Melkan landed with a thunderous crash, his claws tearing into the ground as his rage-fueled aura erupted outward.

[Demon Earl's Intimidation]... BANG... Soldiers stumbled back, fear gripping their hearts as the Demon Earl's imposing form rose before them.

"H-H-He... He is..." one soldier stammered, barely able to form words.

"Fall back" Dravik and Rothgard stepped forward, their faces calm but resolute as they squared off against the enraged Demon Earl.

Melkan's gaze locked onto them, the pressure he was emitting grew suffocating by the moment, causing even the air to ripple.

"It's just like he said" Rothgard looked at Dravik, a smile crept at the corner of his lips.

"Can that man see the future? How did he know it would turn out exactly like this?" the latter chuckled.

The two shared a brief laugh before their expression was soon replaced with seriousness.

"Shall we do this?"

Dravik nodded.

Chapter 982- Unexpected Interference (2)

With deliberate motions, the two of them dropped their weapons. The next second they reached into their space rings, pulling out new weapons.

Rothgard held a black blade while Dravik brandished a pair of curved silver sabres.

Looking at their actions, Melkan scoffed and spoke in mocking derision "You think you can defeat me just because you switched weapons? I am a Demon Earl! Do you even understand what that means? You might as well try to cut down the hell!"

BANG... Melkan's aura flared The shockwave knocked several nearby mercenaries and soldiers unconscious on the spot. Even the monsters faltered, some of them collapsing under the indiscriminate pressure.

"You're awfully loud for someone who just lost their army" Dravik scooped his ears, unbothered by the Demon Earl's aura.

"You are all alone and soon you will meet the same fate as the demons you sent here before" Rothgard followed suit, smearing salt on the wound.

Melkan's laughter died abruptly, his face twisting in fury.

"You dare mock me? Fine, I'll flay you both alive!" The Demon Earl lunged forward his claws tearing through the air like blackened lightning.

BOOM! His strike collided with the ground as the two humans leapt aside just in time, scattering debris in all directions.

Dravik retaliated first, his sabres spinning in a flurry of strikes. Each blow left a trail of silver light, cutting through the air with precision.

In response, Melkan growled, raising his sharp claws to block. Sparks erupted as the enchanted sabres clashed against his hardened claws.

Rothgard followed with a timely counterattack, his massive blade arcing down in a devastating swing aimed at the Demon Earl's exposed back.

"Haahhh!!" Melkan snarled, stretching his wings and causing a gale to manifest.

BOOM... the powerful winds sent both Dravik and Rothgard staggering backwards...

On another part of the fortress, Theron and the other captains finally defeated their own opponents. Having exploited the weakness and traps they had laid beforehand, the Demon Barons were finally brought down by them.

"It looks like we have entered the final phase. It all depends on Sir Dravik and Sir Rothgard now" saying that, he fell heavily on the ground.

"You humans will pay, there is no way Sir Melkan can be defeated" Lying on the floor in a pool of his own blood, Nusgard cursed ominously before succumbing to the swords that penetrated his two hearts.

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Melkan didn't relent. He spread his claws wide, gathering vast amounts of mana that swirled around him.

"[Heat Flare]!" he roared, hurling a massive wave of flames toward the two humans.

"Block it [Silver Moons]!!" Dravik shouted, crossing his sabres in front of him. A glowing barrier of silver light erupted, catching the brunt of the attack.

The force of the spell sent him rolling through the ground and only come to a stop after crashing into a fortified wall.

A crimson sword slash tore through Melkan's [Mana Armor] leaving a deep gash across his chest.

"GUGH!! You filthy humans, you'll pay for that" Melkan roared in pain, his rage only fueled his power. He thrust his hand forward, summoning spiralling flames from the ground. The flames lashed out, ensnaring Rothgard within.

However, before Melkan could connect, the flames were severed by Dravik who was back on his feet again.

BANG... CLANG... The clash between the two opposing forces went on for a while, each side displaying their intimidating strength and impressive skills.

Their fight was on a level of its own and incomparable to any of the fights going around the fortress. Every moment, every second, every move could be decisive and end the fight right there.

It was nerve racking as well as electrifying to watch. At one point, Melkan's claws nearly found their mark, slashing inches from Dravik's neck.

The latter twisted his body at the last second, the attack grazing his shoulder and sending blood spraying into the air.

Rothgard retaliated by slamming his blade into Melkan's open wounds, the impact cracking bone and forcing the demon back.

The fight raged on, the battlefield trembling under the sheer force of their clashes. Each side pushed the other to their limits, a dance of death that blurred the line between victory and annihilation.

Despite his overwhelming power, Melkan's rage made him reckless. He overcommitted to an attack, leaving his left flank exposed.

Dravik capitalized on the opening, driving one of his sabres into his side while Rothgard's massive blade came crashing down onto his shoulder, shattering his pauldrons and cutting deep into his flesh.

The Demon Earl staggered, his aura flickering as blood poured from his wounds. His snarls grew more desperate as he tried to summon another spell, but his movements were too slow and difficult to miss.

"Finish him!!"

Dravik and Rothgard used this chance to deal him the decisive strike. They were heavily injured too; however because they were fighting together and looking out for each other's openings, they were barely able to avoid fatal attacks.

That said, even if they were fighting together and their coordination was impeccable, what they were dealing with was still a Demon Earl and not just any low ranking demon.

Even with their coordination and high level, it would have been very difficult to bring a Demon Earl down. The reason why they managed to do what they did, was due to their opponent's own negligence which was driven by his enraged state of mind.

Had Melkna been in his right mind, he would have never lost against these two. That said, the Demon Earl had underestimated his opponents—and now, it cost him everything.

"This... can't be..." With eyes still full of disbelief, Melkan slowly fell to the ground, blood making a deep pool around him. A Demon Earl's resilience was incredible, even with such hideous wounds, he didn't die immediately.

"We... we won?" The battlefield stilled as the soldiers watched in disbelief. The mighty Demon Earl, an entity they had regarded as an unstoppable force, was finally down.

Chapter 983- Annihilated—The South Wing Army

For a moment, silence blanketed the fortress. Then, like a dam breaking, cheers erupted from every corner. Soldiers and mercenaries screamed in celebration, tears streaming down their faces.

With their leader down, the remaining monsters and slaves fled the battlefield, this was their victory.

As the chaos subsided, the leaders of the South Wing Army gathered near the crumbling walls of the fortress. Rothgard and Dravik stood in the centre, surrounded by captains and vice-captains.

"It still feels like a dream. Stopping them seemed impossible. But not only did we stall their advance... we defeated a Demon Earl and wiped out their platoon."

One of the captains spoke, a bitter sweet smile on his face. He managed to bring down the Demon Baron he was fighting but the cost was his right arm.

"We've done more than survive—we've etched our names into history." Another soldier spoke, he was similarly drenched in blood but nonetheless smiling.

"This victory will shift the tide of the war. And to think... it was all thanks to a single mercenary" Rothgard chuckled.

The group murmured in agreement.

"It wasn't just the plan to use this fortress, He told us everything—the weaknesses of the monsters, the traps to use against them. Even the timing of their attacks. How does someone know all that?" One captain spoke.

"Not to mention... he fought a Demon Noble himself during the decoy operation. I heard he's the reason the diversion force made it back alive" Another added.

"Seriously, who is he?"...

"He asked us not to pry into his affairs. I think we should respect that" Rothgard spoke up before the conversation could lead to some unfounded judgement.

"But, Sir Rothgard... this kind of secret is—what if he's a—"

"I don't want to hear it. If he were our enemy, he wouldn't have shared such crucial information. He could have let us die. Instead, he risked everything to help us achieve this victory. That makes him our ally."

Dravik added in a deep voice "This is a victory for humanity. Don't taint it with baseless suspicions. If Simon has his motives, let them be. For now, he's proven himself a friend."

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"..."

The south wing army was in high spirits, cheering, dancing and mourning for the deceased. The entire fortress was like a festival of hubbub.

Groups of people could be seen chatting, drinking or carrying out their own duties when suddenly all of their actions was disrupted by a piercing whistling noise.

A noise so sharp and shrill that it seemed like the very air was tearing apart. What's more, it was also followed by a familiar voice shouting a warning at them.

However, before they could perceive anything, it was already over.

BOOOOOOM...

The entire summit of Mount Gorgor was consumed in a terrifying explosion. The air trembled violently, a distortion rippling across the mountain as if the space itself were tearing apart.

The summit of Mount Gorgor seemed to collapse inward, a massive vortex of vacuum formed pulling everything—air, stone, fire, and life into its centre.

A dark, pulsating wave surged outward, consuming and erasing everything. Buildings, soldiers, monsters, the very earth—it all vanished into the void, leaving behind an unnatural silence.

The heart of the mountain glowed briefly with an ominous, violet black hue, before imploding entirely. There was no smoke no nothing, just a gaping void. That was how absolute the black light was. .

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A few minutes earlier before the black light hit the mountain, high above the clouds. Vordanaz observed the scene below with a detached gaze, his crimson eyes glinting faintly.

Beside him, Gareth, wore an amused smile as he watched Melkan getting defeated.

"Pathetic, at the end he was nothing more than a stepping stone for the humans. What a disappointment" He scoffed removing his gaze from the Demon Earl as if the other party was not even worth it anymore.

His expression turned interested the next second as he looked at the humans celebrating after winning a big war.

"These humans, their ingenuity in this battle was... surprising to say no less. Using the monsters' weaknesses is one thing, but to predict the Demon Barons' movements and even counter the Ruinbound Golems? It doesn't fit."

Gareth continued, his tone more thoughtful now "Something is off, they planned for every move, every action, too well. It's almost like they knew exactly what we'd do."

"True. But even if they won this one, this victory means little in the grand scheme of things" Vordanaz replied, his expression unreadable.

Gareth sneered "Little, maybe. But it's still a loss. Losses leave a bitter aftertaste, especially when they are a huge waste of time."

Vordanaz was still silent, after a while he spoke in a non-interested tone "Let's leave".

"Leave? Just like that?"...

"The humans won this one, there is nothing to be done about it"...

"Even so... don't you find it revolting?".

Vordanaz turned to face Gareth, suspicions creeping into his tone. "I hope you're not thinking of doing anything foolish. Lord Agramon's orders were clear—no high-ranking demons are to interfere directly on the battlefield without his permission."

"Oh, I remember Lord Agramon's orders. There's no way I would go against them." Gareth tilted his head, a smile that sent chills through even Vordanaz, crept on his face.

"However, something about this situation doesn't bode well with me. Don't get me wrong, I'm not a sore loser. I can respect the... ingenuity of the humans' victory. But what I can't tolerate is seeing them win at all."

"Gareth. Don't!!"

The entire sky around Mount Gorgor darkened in an instant and before Vordanaz could say anything further, Gareth had already raised his hand.

Within a time frame that was shorter than a second, Gareth extended his hand— a sphere of darkness so dark that it even devoured the light from the surrounding, formed on his palm.

It started with the size of a golf ball and quickly grew to the size of a football. This mass of black energy, it wasn't just any ordinary attack, it was like an anti light that stained the world black.

"Abyss Magic Mastery— A deep gurgling noise came from Gareth and with that, the dark mass shot forward.

Chapter 984- Annihilated—The South Wing Army (2)

Like a beam of annihilation, it streaked downwards and crashed onto the mountain at a blinding speed.

BOOM!! The attack hit Mount Gorgor in an instant, faster than anyone could react. The mountain seemed to scream as it was enveloped in the ray of darkness. The very ground quivered, twisting unnaturally before collapsing inward as if sucked into a bottomless void.

The light from the attack radiated briefly, casting a dark dome over the sky for dozens of miles before vanishing entirely. When the light faded, there was nothing left but the aftermath.

The mountain was gone, its summit replaced by a flat, smouldering crater.

"Perfect," Gareth clapped marvelling at his work "No traces left behind, no messy loose ends. That's how it should be".

Vordanaz grit his teeth, unable to stay silent any longer "You fool, what have you done? You just fired a Niðh...".

Before he could say any further, Gareth turned towards him, the same cold smile still playing on his face "I know, I will report this to the Demon Lord myself. That said, I am very curious as to why you are so worked up. Don't tell me you actually wanted to let those humans live?"

At the end of his sentence, Gareth's eyes narrowed to a dangerous degree. Due to the long years of conflict and inability to get along, it had practically been ingrained inside every demon noble to hate humans.

However, this was different. This level of hostility was on another realm.

"Suit yourself" Unable to retort, Vordanaz spat, turned around and vanished into the distant sky.

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Somewhere in the sky, not too far from Mount Gorgor, two figures streaked through the air at incredible speed, their forms cutting through the clouds like golden and silver comets.

Suddenly, a flash of black light illuminated the horizon. It was there for only a moment, but its dark presence left the air charged with an unnatural heaviness.

In the distance, a massive dark dome appeared for an instant before disappearing just as quickly. One of the figures stopped abruptly, their long golden cloak whipping violently in the wind.

"Vincent is that..."

The other figure nodded, eyes strained towards the black dome that only appeared in the distant sky for a second.

"There is no denying it. That is Niðhögg, someone fired it"....

The figure with the golden cloak spoke in a pensive voice "I hope we are not late. Let's hurry up".

Without another word, the two figures surged forward, their speed doubling as they raced toward the source of the devastation.

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The once-mighty summit of Mount Gorgor was now a lifeless expanse of shattered stone and choking dust.

The crater left behind by the beam stretched far and wide, even the edges of the mountain were severed cleanly as if sliced by the heavens themselves.

The place that was just a moment ago abuzz with the shouts and conversation of the south wing army, was now eerily silent like a cemetery.

It was after some time, the dirt shifted. Two massive grey columns erupted from the rubble, covered in cryptic glowing markings that pulsed faintly with ominous energy. The air around them seemed repelled by their presence.

The grey columns were none other than the Fingers of Ozymandias. As the dirt and rocks were displaced, a bloodied figure clawed out of the ruins.

Simon gasped for air, his body battered and broken. Dust covered his hair and clothes, and blood trickled from his wounds. Every slight action, every movement sent a searing pain all through his body.

"Damn it..." he cursed under his breath, his left arm was gone and his disguise had become undone.

That said, even with injuries that would have killed a lesser being, it was nothing for a Demon Marquess like him who possessed incredible vitality and regenerative abilities.

He closed his eyes and focused, channelling his mana. Bit by bit, tissues and bone began to regrow from his severed shoulder, cuts and bruises across his body healed and Within moments, he was all healed.

Though it didn't cause him to celebrate, the reason for that was because of what lay in front of him.

As his eyes swept over the destruction, Simon's heart sank. The fortress was gone, the soldiers gone, everything wiped from existence as if it had never been.

"What the hell was that..." The black beam of destruction was still vivid in his mind, a streak of pure annihilation that descended with no warning, no fanfare and swallowed everything.

The entire mountaintop was gone in an instant. The realization hit him hard. The South Wing Army—the soldiers, the mercenaries, the captains—they were all gone.

His gaze darted across the rubble, searching desperately for any sign of life, but all he could see were broken stones and lifeless silence.

Why? How did he fail? Everything was going smoothly he had managed to hoodwink Vordanaz, win over the South wing army and even use a scapegoat to scrape for time.

Everything was going all so smoothly only for it all to come crashing down suddenly. Where did he make a mistake?

Was it impossible to save the South Wing Army from obliteration from the beginning?

No, it was the appearance of that figure that changed everything. The moment he appeared things were bound to go wrong.

"Perhaps I should have expected a butterfly effect to take place for my meddling..."

Even if it was just an enacted history, it still played out as if it was real. In the original timeline, there was no being called Simon and naturally, there was no one to meddle in the affairs of the demon lord and south wing army.

Thought as he much, there were no do overs. He had failed the quest making it impossible to clear the trial. Simon hesitated before opening the quest window.

There it was: [Stop the Southern Alliance from Getting Annihilated]. His heart sank further as he prepared to see the word: {Failed} next to it. However, to his shock, it wasn't there. Instead, the quest status read: In Progress.

What does that mean? Could it be... Simon's thoughts raced.

Chapter 985- Meeting the Two Heroes of the past.

If the quest was still active, there could only be one reason. Driven by a mix of tenacity and a stubborn refusal to accept defeat, Simon began digging.

Tossing aside massive stones he continued to search, before long he found a few bodies mangled and incomplete, their forms unrecognizable. That is to say, they were dead.

Simon gritted his teeth, refusing to let despair claim him. Time blurred as he dug, the wreckage seemed endless.

Finally, as he dug a faint aura that seemed like it would extinguish any moment, caught his attention. Simon's eyes narrowed, and he dug with renewed vigor.

After moving a massive boulder aside, he finally found it, a body broken and bloodied, but alive.

The person's chest rose and fell weakly, their life flickered like a dying flame. Hurriedly, he purchased high tier potions from the [Shop] and poured them over the body.

Slowly, agonizingly, the person's wounds began to heal. Flesh knitted together, wounds closed, and the faint spark of life grew stronger.

Simon leaned back, sighing a breath of relief as the figure's aura steadied. Only then did he take a good look at the person he had saved. Blood and dirt had obscured their features before, but now their appearance was discernable.

"Rothgard!!"

Simon called out, there was no mistaking the man, he was the commander in chief of the south wing army. The only person who had somehow miraculously survived the disaster.

"Kugh!!" Rothgard threw a mouthful of blood and coughed violently. Although his life was out of danger, he was still heavily injured.

Simon carefully laid him down and bought a few more potions and recovery items. He didn't want the other party to kick the bucket since whether he could clear the quest or not depended on it.

Simon was in the midst of tending to the injured men when suddenly his senses flared up and alarm bells rang in his head like an omen.

"Hmm? This is quite unusual. What is a Demon Marquess doing here all alone?"...

"The entire place has been flattened. There is no mistaking it, it was fired here. The fact that we can't see the south wing army here must mean that they were obliterated by that".

Simon froze. Two voices, so ordinary yet full of mystical resonance, had spoken directly behind him without so much as a sound to herald their arrival.

When did they get here? No, in the first place, how did they get so close to him without him even realising it?

"Hmm, it seems we were a little too late"...

One of the voices spoke with a voice tinged with regret and sadness. Though the next second they turned cold when directed at him.

"In any case, we need to know what happened here. Would you step aside, young demon? The injured man lying before you is my friend."

Simon's body stiffened as he felt two pairs of eyes like weights of ten mountains pressing down on him. His instincts screamed at him to move, and without hesitation, he activated his skills, leapt up and created a distance between him and the newcomers.

"[Niðr]?! " one of them mused, "No, it was slower than that. Could it be [Black Flash]?! This demon has achieved that."

The two remained unfazed by the demon's movement and continued to converse. This gave Simon a moment to size up the newcomers.

The first figure, the one who had spoken earlier, had blonde hair that gleamed like molten gold and wore golden armor adorned with intricate engravings. Every piece of his gear exuded majesty, as though forged by the hands of a divine artisan.

The second figure, had long silver hair and a suit of white armor that rivalled the golden one in grandeur.

Despite the extravagance of their attire, it felt perfectly natural on them. The gear shone not because of its brilliance, but because of the aura and presence of those who wore it.

Simon observed the two carefully, the man in golden armor had an extremely handsome face, one that could rival even the high ranking Demon Nobles. His features were sharp yet regal, with a strong jawline, piercing eyes and golden hair perfectly complementing the resplendence of his armor.

He gave off an inborn noble and cool charisma that gave others a good impression of him.

On the other hand, the man in silver armor had a face that was almost too sharp, like a sculpture carved from steel. His eyebrows were like two finely honed swords, narrow and intense, cutting into anyone he laid his eyes upon.

His stance was unyielding, his posture firm and upright like a spear pointed skyward—stoic, unbending, and resolute.

Despite the contrasts in their demeanor, both of their auras were so in sync that it would be hard not to mistake them.

The two figures had their auras restrained and their guards relaxed making one wonder if they were underestimating just because there was only one demon.

However, Simon knew better than to believe that. Their relaxed postures were not signs of vulnerability but of absolute confidence.

This is bad... Simon thought grimly. He had already tried to use his {Appraisal} skill on them, only for it to be blocked.

How many beings in this world can block [Appraisal]? So far, the ones who Simon met could do that were the ones who stood at the pinnacle of this world. A realm so high that it was difficult to imagine.

The two figures in front stood at that realm or at the very least they were at a level that the current him could not match.

"My friend, are you alright? Don't worry. We're here now."

The man in golden armor crouched beside Rothgard, his expression softened as he examined his friend's condition. He rummaged through his space ring, pulling out potions and medical herbs.

While the golden one was tending to Rothgard, the silver haired man took a half-step forward, his piercing gaze locking onto Simon.

Chapter 986- Meeting the Two Heroes of the past (2)

"You tend to him. In the meantime, I'll wring every bit of information out of this demon who dared harm him" Saying that, he extended his two fingers and pointed at the demon.

"Who fired that [Níðhöggr]? Answer me, demon"...

Níðhöggr? Simon wanted to ask what was that; however, before he could, he saw the silver haired man draw a line in the air with his fingers.

An action so inconspicuous and ordinary, yet it was this seemingly ordinary motion that screamed of death.

Simon hurriedly activated all of his movement and augmenting skills and got out of the way. A fraction of a second later, the space where he stood previously, was torn apart. A long silver gash, clean and precise appeared and lingered in the air for a long time.

Gulp... Simon gulped as he looked at the cut. The edges of the tear glowed faintly, its sheer sharpness distorting even the surrounding air. Had he been a second slower, he'd be sliced clean in half.

"A Demon marquess managed to dodge that? Impressive" the silver haired man arched his brows "Looks like this one's got skills way above his rank. Must be some elite bloodline demon... maybe one of those Prima Demon Archduke successors?".

He then shook his head, dismissing the idea "Doesn't matter. Enemy's an enemy."

Whoosh... suddenly his aura shifted the pressure around him becoming suffocating. He wasn't holding back anymore. His fingers started glowing faintly, the silver light flickering like sparks.

"You've got three seconds to explain what happened here."

This time, Vincent moved faster. His glowing fingers sliced through the air in an arc, too quick for Simon to follow.

SLASH... Pain erupted across his chest. A clean cut ran from his shoulder to his waist, blood pouring out like a flood.

"Kugh!" Simon stumbled back, clutching the wound. His expression was distorted and his breathing distorted, but the light in his eyes never dimmed.

Even against impossible odds like this where the chance of him winning was next to none, he was still searching and probing for a way to win.

"If you're giving me three seconds, then wait three seconds, damn it" he cursed.

"That was just a warning. I could've killed you, but I didn't because I want answers. So stop playing games and start talking" The silver haired man spoke, his voice calm and cold.

"One... Two..." With each second, the glow in his fingers intensified and so did the pressure.

What do I do? I can't outrun him nor can I fight him directly. This is bad. Dammit now that it has come to this, I'll stake everything in this final gamble... Simon was ready to risk it all, the fingers of Ozymandias flashed, curse energy oozing out of them.

"Three. So, you're not going to talk? Fine. I'll just cut off your hands and legs first."

The silver haired man raised his hand, and just when he was about to drop it, a voice interjected.

"Wait... Vincent!!!" A weak, rasping shout broke through the tension, stopping the silver haired man mid-swing. Both he and the golden-haired man turned toward the voice.

It was Rothgard, coughing violently he struggled to get on his feet.

"You shouldn't try to move, my friend. Stay down, we'll handle this." the golden-haired man spoke softly supporting the former.

But Rothgard shook his head, "No, Itherion. I have to do this."

His gaze turned toward Simon, there was surprise, acceptance, resignation and also some regret. However, there was no repulsiveness or hatred in his eyes.

"So... you're a Demon Noble huh" Rothgard's lips cracked into a smile "It all makes sense now... why you knew so much. How the decoy force survived... I had an inkling when you told us all that.."

Slowly the man bowed his and expressed his gratitude "Thank you... thanks to you we were able to accomplish our task".

Simon was silent, his expression unreadable. He wasn't used to such sincerity, especially from a human, but after a brief moment, he nodded. It was surprising for him to not see Rothgard display any of the typical hatred or enmity the two races shared.

"What is going on?"

Seeing Rothgard converse with the Demon Marquess and even express gratitude, the two figures couldn't help but question.

"Simon is not our enemy. In fact, he's the one who helped us hold the demon horde back for so long."

For a moment, the two couldn't believe their ears. They even stared at Rothgard as if he had gone insane from the trauma.

"You're telling me a Demon Noble helped you?" the golden haired man inquired.

"That's right, not only did he give us the information and weakness on the platoon sent here by the demon horde, but he even acted as a decoy to buy us time. Although as you can see we were obliterated in the end, we managed to somehow complete our task of slowing the enemy down"

At the end of his sentence, Rothgard's tone carried a tone of bitterness and self mockery.

The two looked at him with deep meaning. A demon noble helping humans? It was easier to believe cows could fly. No wonder the two thought that Rothgard's memory had been tampered with.

The silver haired man looked at the golden who shook his head "I don't sense any tampering with his mind. So, you're really telling us the demon helped you?"

Rothgard nodded again, explaining everything—their plan to use the fortress on Mount Gorgor, Simon's role in their resistance, and how they ultimately fell to the devastating attack.

The more they listened, the more their expressions shifted from scepticism to grim acknowledgement. By the time Rothgard finished, both men sighed deeply.

"You've been through hell," The golden haired man said softly, placing a comforting hand on Rothgard's shoulder "It's a miracle you're alive at all."

Step... The silver haired man stepped forward, his action immediately warranted caution from Simon who was ready to use the finger of Ozymandias at a moment's notice. However, thanks to Rothgard's intervention, things didn't lead to a confrontation.

Chapter 987- Meeting the Two Heroes of the past (3)

"Don't worry. I mean no harm" Noticing the demon's caution, the silver haired man raised his hands demonstrating that he meant no harm.

"You saved my friend, that makes you a benefactor to us. I would never harm someone who saved Rothgard. You can relax."

Simon was silent on the surface but did not relax his guard immediately. Without a word, he pulled a few potions from his [Shop] and drank them in quick succession.

The other party watched him for a moment before reaching into their own space ring. Retrieving an ornate potion bottle, they passed it to him.

"About earlier, how should I say this..." The silver haired man fumbled for words as if not used to it. The next second though he made up his mind and spoke clearly.

"I want to apologize. I didn't know you were the one who saved Rothgard and helped the South Wing Army. As an apology, take this."

To anyone in that situation it would look like Simon was the bad guy after all, one guy was lying on the ground in a pool of blood and riddled with injuries while the other standing next to him was unscathed and extending their claws towards the former.

Not to mention the fact that he was a Demon Noble didn't help either. It was easier to paint him in a negative picture.

Simon glanced at the potion briefly before shaking his head "No need."

When it came to potions and other things, he had the [Shop] function with him that allowed him to buy items of the highest grade.

The silver haired man didn't force and observed him for a while before letting out a short chuckle "You're quite peculiar."

For someone who had just tried to kill him, he seemed oddly chatty now. That said, Simon didn't know whether he should feel happy being called peculiar.

"Don't get me wrong, you're a Demon Noble, and I don't like your kind. Demons are the root of all evil—calamities, destruction, war. All of it. Throughout history, demons have been at the centre of every catastrophe this world has faced. Every time something happens, it's always the Demons at the core of it"

Realising that he got too heated, the silver haired man calmed himself down.

"Anyways, you're different. You helped the South Wing Army and saved Rothgard. Whether it was a whim or part of your scheme, the fact is, you helped. And I don't like owing favours. So... if there's anything you want, name it."

"Haha, look at that, you are actually talking to someone other than me. I thought you'd stay an antisocial hermit forever."

A voice timely interjected. The golden-haired man walked closer.

"How is he?"

"I'll be fine. My injuries are a lot better now, thanks to all of you" Rothgard answered for himself, his voice raspy but steady. He then glanced towards Simon and spoke—

"You should take the reward they're offering. Don't let it go to waste. It may not look like it, but these two are the strongest warriors on our side. Let me introduce them properly. The silver-haired man here is Vincent. He's got a sharp tongue and seems antisocial, but the truth is, he's just a clumsy guy who doesn't know how to make friends."

The man who was referred to as Vincent, clicked his tongue seemingly bothered being called antisocial and whatnot.

"If you keep running your mouth, I'll show you just how 'friendly' I can be".

Next, Rothgard pointed at the golden haired man "The one next to me is the duke of our empire: Itherion Solarion. You may have heard of our empire before, it went by the name Valoria. However, the name changed once the new heir rose to the throne".

His voice grew heavier, laced with unmistakable pride as he explained the next point. "Though since you are a Demon noble, I bet you know them by their other titles".

Simon raised an eyebrow, waiting for the explanation. The ones who overcame the thousand trials — the Conquerors. And the one who rejected the Angels— The Foolish".

The weight of those titles hung in the air. To anyone else, those words alone would have struck like a thunderclap, stirring awe or terror. But for Simon, they only raised more questions.

Titles like these mean little when you're not from this timeline. Simon wasn't shaken by the grandiose titles—but the names themselves were a different story.

Itherion... The name hit him like a spark to dry wood. He couldn't forget it, not when it was engraved in his Main Quest, listed alongside the Demon Lord of Envy and the Seraphim of Honor.

Itherion Solarion... Who would have thought he would meet one of the legendary figures who would go down in history as a warrior who reshaped the world, in such an odd situation?

The very idea seemed absurd, but here he was, standing in the presence of someone who would become the stuff of legends.

Simon's gaze settled on Itherion. It was no wonder he felt such immense pressure from the man even though the latter was simply standing there. It was because there was an undeniable gulf between them.

This man stood on a level that allowed him to look down on the myriad beings of this world. According to history, Itherion would fight with the Seraphim of Honor and together, they would cull the Demon Lord of Envy, plunging the world and essentially the war into an even greater chaos.

His accomplishments would echo across time, his name immortalized in the annals of Altahean history.

Simon couldn't help but feel a pang of excitement. To see that fight firsthand... to witness the sheer power of beings at the peak of their existence. It would have been an eye-opener, a chance to understand his own powers and limitations. After all, his goal too was to stand on that realm one day.

Unfortunately, that wasn't an option. The objective of this trial was clear—stop the fight from happening. No matter how much Simon wanted to witness such an epic clash, he couldn't allow it.

Chapter 988- Caged

He needed to find a way to prevent these two forces from taking each other's lives.

Simon shifted his gaze to the silver-haired man. If Itherion's name struck a chord, Vincent's rang a bell of its own. Although the man didn't have a surname like the other guy, his name was no small deal either.

His thoughts drifted back to a couple of years ago when he was still naive enough to believe in befriending humans. Back then, he had been relentlessly hunted by the Kingdom of Ellesmere—so much so that Adalinda herself had to intervene.

Realising her immense might, one of the rankers had tried to use the reputation of the Adventurers' Association to intimidate her. But to his disappointment, far from being intimidated, she was not even fazed. She was the same haughty, insufferable being that she was.

At that time, she used a name to scare the living daylights out of those rankers. Vincent... the name held a strong meaning after all, it was the name of the president of the Adventurers Association, a behemoth like organization that stretched across the Central Continent.

To be able to command the Adventurers' Association—a group filled with Rankers and powerhouses—was proof of unmatched skill and influence. Also, the very fact that Adalinda considered him to be one of the few people who could talk terms with her proved this point.

Vincent... although the two names could just be a coincidence, Simon felt like that was not the case. The silver-haired man standing before him might be that very same Vincent someone who would create the organisation named as the Adventurers Association later down the history.

"What's with that look?"

Seeing Simon's flavorless reaction, Rothgard tilted his head, a question mark practically hovering over him.

Usually, when he revealed who they are, people would jump out of their skin—either in fear, awe, or outright reverence. But Simon, he barely reacted. His reaction was flimsy at best.

"Do you perhaps not know their names?" Even though he asked, he knew that was not the case. After all, these two names were so famous that even beings from other continents knew their names.

There was no way their neighbor and arch enemies, the demon noble wouldn't know about them.

"It's not like that. I am surprised. But if I have to be truthful... I guess I've never heard of those titles before."

Simon's words hit like a gong in the quiet air. The three humans reacted differently. Vincent narrowed his eyes, suspicious. Itherion raised a brow, intrigued. But the most dramatic reaction came from Rothgard, whose jaw dropped so hard Simon half-expected it to hit the ground.

"You've NEVER heard of their titles?! Itherion Solarion and Vincent, the Conquerors of the Thousand Trials?! You're telling me you don't know about them?!"

Seeing Simon stay silent, it was as if Rothgard's top blew off. It was very comical how he was unable to handle the idea that there existed a Demon Noble—of all beings—who didn't know these two legendary figures from their human race.

Before Vincent or Itherion could stop him, Rothgard launched into an impassioned explanation.

"The Conquerors of the Thousand Trials! Do you even understand what that title signifies? It's not just some empty label—it's a recognition of unparalleled achievement. A title given only to those who succeeded in what was thought impossible"

"The Thousand Trials... it's one of the most infamous Forbidden Grounds in existence. For as long as history has been recorded, it has stood as a challenge to all beings. Countless have attempted it, and countless have failed... that is until these two beat it".

He pointed at Itherion and Vincent beside him.

Simon raised an eyebrow, this was new information. Itherion and Vincent cleared a Forbidden Ground! The concept of the Forbidden Grounds intrigued him after all he too was chosen by one of the Forbidden Grounds and was currently undergoing one of its trials.

Rothgard continued "Those who overcome the Forbidden grounds are granted the Ancient Symbols. Itherion bears the Golden Symbol and Vincent holds the Silver, a proof of their greatness. Billions of beings dream of possessing the Ancient Symbol; however, only a handful few ever managed to become their master. Hence they are called Conquerors"

Simon narrowed his eyes in understanding. Ancient Symbols... it seemed like there was much about the world that he still had to learn.

"As for the other title— The Foolish..." Rothgard's voice dropped slightly becoming sombre "That title isn't something that they deserved. It was a nasty ploy by those angels when they rejected one of the Seraphim's offer to join their scripture".

Simon frowned, from the Memories of the world, he at least understood that joining the scripture meant joining their divine order and gaining the blood of the angels.

An opportunity like that was like a miracle to come by and these two had rejected that? It was no wonder they got stuck with that Title.

That said, it at least said one thing about them, even the ruler of all angels, one of the Seraphim thought so highly of them to want them to join his side.

Simon's eyes flicked toward the two men in question. Itherion's face was calm, almost amused, while Vincent's expression remained as stoic as ever.

"The angels and the rest of the world might make fun of their decision by calling them 'The Foolish'. But to us, it is a symbol of faith and courage. Courage to stand against a Seraphim and forge our own paths"

"Hmph, the world thinks that we humans are unable to reach the realm the angels and the demons could reach with just our meagre strength and bloodline. Guess what, we can reach that realm with our own strength alone. To prove the angels, to prove the world that humans have unlimited potential".

Simon was silent as he heard Rothgard's impassioned speech. As someone who had also climbed his way to his current rank, he understood full well how challenging and arduous the path can be. The hurdles, walls, bottlenecks, overcoming one's limit is never easy.

Chapter 989- Caged (2)

The fact that Itherion and Vincent were able to accomplish what was thought impossible, showed how truly incredible they were.

Humanity was strong even without the angels, this was a fact proven time and time again through history.

'No wonder the demon nobles were never able to gain an advantage over the humans in all these years' Simon thought inwardly.

"Now do you know how incredible these two are? Let me tell you they have not only Conquered the Thousand Trials but they... "

"Alright, alright... that's enough, Rothgard. You've explained plenty."

Rothgard who was about to go into another impassioned explanation, was stopped by Itherion. The latter chuckled and calmed his friend down "We're veering off topic. Let's not overwhelm the demon."

Saying that, Itherion looked at Simon and offered "As Rothgard said, if you have any reward in mind, ask freely. You've earned it."

Simon remained silent, lost in thought as he carefully weighed his options. The three humans were insistent—adamant even—on rewarding him for his actions, leaving him unable to reject their offer outright.

He understood their intent clearly. They wished to clear the slate, to write off the favour they owed him. After all, nobody liked owing a favour. Especially being at the peak of power like them, it was not a good feeling for them.

That said, Simon had no interest in any material wealth they could offer. Items, artifacts, weapons, or money—none of it held any real value for someone like him.

Thanks to the [Gacha] and [Shop] options in his possession, he was already overflowing with resources. His inventory was teeming with unused items, some of which were gathering dust simply because he had no immediate use for them.

Some were used like disposables, thrown into the armoury to refine higher tier items, others simply sitting in his space ring, waiting for the day to be used. Asking for yet another object to add to his already big collection seemed pointless.

So, what should he ask for as a reward?

As Simon mulled over this dilemma, an idea struck him. Material wealth might hold no value to him, but there was something far more precious that he severely lacked: information. It was the one thing that could shape the course of his actions and provide clarity in a world he still understood so little about.

Despite his inherited memories, Simon's knowledge of the broader world remained painfully incomplete.

Events like Hexennacht and Walpurgis had showed him, just how out of touch with the world he truly was. If not for these events, he wouldn't even know what was going on around the world.

Other high-ranking demons had vast information networks, capable of keeping them informed about every recent development in a matter of moments.

Simon, however, was still preoccupied with defending his dungeon and eliminating nearby threats, so he was far from being in a position to build such a network.

What he needed most was knowledge—information that could help him prepare for what lay ahead. And who better to ask for information than Itherion and Vincent?

Just as Rothgard said, the two humans in front of him were extraordinary individuals, the strongest the humanity could offer in the current era. Clearly, they were privy to a lot of information that could allow him to clear the trial and possibly fill his Memories of the world.

With his mind made up, Simon spoke "I don't want items or artifacts as my reward, what I want is information".

When he said those words, the three humans looked at him with amused expression. However, their amusement quickly gave way to understanding.

Itherion nodded approvingly, a small smile playing at the corners of his lips "A wise choice. Information is power. Knowing what goes on around you allows you to predict what's coming. Since I promised to reward you, ask your questions freely. If it is within my knowledge, I will tell you the truth without withholding anything. However..."

His expression grew solemn "I would advise against asking questions that go against my morals."

Simon nodded, he was not interested in any hidden stratagems the humans, angels and the other members of the alliance had devised.

Though knowing it would allow him to clear the objectives of his trial more easily. However, doing so would earn distrust and probably spoil his relationship with the humans here.

No, there was something far more pressing on his mind. What Simon truly wanted to know was about the Second Apex War.

Ever since his arrival in this trial, this event had loomed over him like a dark cloud. A war so devastating that it consumed entire continents in its flames, leaving unimaginable casualties in its wake.

Battles so catastrophic they permanently scarred the land, evidence of their destruction still lingering to this day.

Why? Why did such a massive conflict occur? What led to it? Who were the perpetrators responsible for plunging the world into such chaos?

Simon met Itherion's gaze and asked his question. "I want to know about the Second Apex War, what caused it? And why did it escalate into such a catastrophic conflict?"

For a second, the three humans fell silent, their expression shifting between confusion and surprise.

"You don't know what sparked the Second Apex War?" They couldn't believe that there was someone in the current world who didn't know about it.

Seeing the demon's serious face, Itherion sighed and answered. "If that's your question, I will answer as honestly as I can. The war... It didn't start for a single reason. Like most conflicts, it was a culmination of events, decisions, and forces that spiralled out of control"...

"This isn't just a war between Demon horde and demons. It's a war of ideologies, a clash of survival, power, and ambition. Decades ago, the Demon Lords suddenly began expanding their territories aggressively, subjugating lesser beast and monster clans and spreading their influence toward the Central Continent"...

"At first, we believed that it was just another skirmish that would end soon. Treaties were signed, trade was established, and for a while, there was peace."

Chapter 990- Caged (3)

As he listened this far, Simon tilted his head. The demon Lords suddenly started expanding territories? The reason sounded too flimsy and whimsical for it to invoke a war of such a massive scale.

As a demon noble himself, he knew that the territory in the Demon continent wasn't favourable to life which is why the fertile land of the central continent was so coveted.

However, the demon noble had overcome that by establishing their own dungeons. As long as they had enough DP, they could turn their place into any place they found desirable.

There was no meaning in the demon nobles aggressively expanding their territories other than as a show of force. However, even then it was not feasible to risk full on war with the Alliance.

Even he who was not born in this era, could see that. So there is no way the other high ranking demon nobles weren't aware of it either.

Itherion continued, a silent fury burning in his voice "When the Demon Lords began their campaigns of conquest, human settlements near their borders were destroyed. Hundreds and thousands of people were wiped out, their people enslaved or massacred"...

"Humanity was being pushed into the corner. Unable to take it any further, we made alliances and retaliated. Thus began the spiral".

Vincent added, his voice sharp "This wasn't just about land or survival. The current Demon Lords are consolidating power. Some believe they aren't just after our territory—they are after something else. Something tied to the very balance of this world".

Balance?

"There are forces in this world— forces that keep it from tipping too far into chaos or order. The Demon Lords want to disrupt that balance. To what end? No one knows for sure. But it's clear their ambitions don't stop at mere conquest".

Vincent said no more and shut his mouth closed, appearing unapproachable.

Itherion took it upon himself to explain further "That is one more thing but if you are asking what was the final spark that led to the current world encompassing war, then it would be the drawing of the Seraphim's blood"...

"It was supposed to be a pact, a last attempt at peace. The Seraphims came in to mediate a meeting between the Demon Lords and human leaders before the war could escalate any further. Both sides agreed to make peace and a neutral ground was chosen for the signing of the pact"...

"However, it was all a plot. The demon nobles used this chance to kill one of the Seraphims and take out the races allied with the Alliance. This act of betrayal evoked a great ire from all the races causing a massive war to erupt. And that is also when the world was plunged into chaos".

The air grew heavy as the weight of the war's origins settled over them. Simon's mind raced as he listened intently, piecing together what he'd learned.

The balance of the world, the ambitions of the Demon Lords, the failed peace treaty—it all painted a picture far more complex than he had anticipated.

These were all the information about the Second Apex War he was unaware of. The historical records have very little information scribed and the people of the current timeline remembered even less of that.

The Second Apex war, the cataclysmic event that took the world by storm... there were many factors, events and elements yet to surface.

What Iterion and Vincent recited completely painted the Demon Nobles in a negative light making them as the main perpetrators of the war. However, after experiencing the war and the world for himself, Simon knew better than to believe something at face value.

There are many facets to a war and essentially the world; which is why, one cannot just simply blindly trust what they see and hear.

It was kind of like his previous world where news and media blew a topic to epic proportions where even the truth was completely obscured. This is why, if Simon wanted to get to the core of the matter, he needed to get testimonies from both sides.

"What's your next question, demon?"

Itherion's voice snapped Simon out of his daze. He thought for a moment before his next question.

"Who killed the Seraphim? And which Seraphim was it?"

Before Itherion could answer, Vincent who was standing aloofly by the side, suddenly had a shift in his expression. His silver eyes flashed and he was in a battle ready state.

"That question has to wait. Something is wrong".

Itherion rose to his feet, his eyes scanning the surrounding "I feel it too. Something is.. out of place here.

"Hm?" Simon who had no idea what the two were talking about, was suddenly drawn by a peculiar tremble he felt from near him.

When he shifted his gaze to the origin, there he saw the Fingers of Ozymandias trembling violently. The runes marked in them were flashing with a chaotic light.

What was going on? Why would the Figner of Ozymandias react all of a sudden?

Before Simon could ponder further, a vision like an omen flashed in his mind.

RUMBLE... Mount Gorgor collapsing completely. A massive abyss formed beneath it. Dark, murky green energy spreads like a noxious film over the world and two figures locked in a desperate fight.

ZAP... The vision ended and the world was back to normal again.

Huff... Huff... Simon gasped for air, his eyes widened. That just now was no ordinary vision but occurrences in the future. That is to say, what he saw earlier was glimpses from the future.

Why now? He had seen such phenomena before, thanks to the mysterious power of his right eye—the Celestial Ocularis. Though rare, these visions always came right before the calamity.

"We need to leave this place right now," Simon hurriedly cautioned, but he was a step too late. A dark, murky green liquid started oozing from the ground beneath them.

"What's happening? Why is everything turning dark green?" Rothgard looked around in confusion. New factors, new elements that were otherwise omitted from the records of history are starting to surface up. What could this mean?