

Earths GMagus 161

Chapter 161: Dare

Grand Hall Assembly

A few hours ago, the huge courtyard below the stairs heading up to the purple pillar had been filled with hundreds of second year acolytes. Now, however, it was starting to fill up once again, as beams of lights transported new acolytes as well as other figures. Instead of staying on the floor, they all walked up the stairs, making their way toward the rows of seats on the side. Some of them were in groups, others were alone.

Based on the clothings of these people, they were a mix of third year acolytes as well as magi from all kinds of institutions. After they took their seats, they looked up to watch the big screen broadcasting a live feed of what was happening in the virtual arena.

A young man dressed all in black walked up the stairs and a magus came to greet him. "Ah, Magus Xion, welcome I am glad you can join us."

Magus Xion nodded in response and proceeded to walk straight to the second row of stairs, where only magi were allowed to be seated. This row offered a better view of the multiple cubes' projection of the virtual arena.

In that place, there were dozens of people sitting looking at the ceiling of the central area, which was filled with screens of the battle situation on the bridge.

Magus Xion eventually found an empty spot. After taking a seat, he started watching the large projection. There were about a hundred screens showing every team of acolytes fighting off the waves of creatures heading toward the orb in the middle of the bridge.

At the bottom of the screen in the middle of the courtyard, the blond magus, Serena, who was hosting the game, was giving comments about the happenings inside the game that reverberated throughout the whole stadium.

"The level three of 'Defend the orb' has started! It won't be long until we get some of the unfortunate second year acolytes showing up!" said Magus Serena, holding an object before her, which seemed to amplify her voice. And true to what she had commented on, about ten minutes later, multiple beams of light appeared in the courtyard and spawned out second year acolytes who looked around confused.

"And here it is! Our first set of contestants that failed! Thank you for joining the game. Now go stand to the side... weaklings." The last word was faint, but the voice amplifier Serena was holding still managed to pick it up, hence it was heard throughout the whole hall.

Another set of lights appeared and out came more acolytes. Serena quickly picked up her voice amplifier and said, "Welcome, welcome. Thank you for playing the game. Oh wait, we have someone crying! If you're just going to be sad, then just quit already!"

This time, everyone heard it loud and clear, but her viciousness, masked by her high-pitched upbeat voice and pretty pink outfit, didn't seem to garner any sympathy from the audience. In fact, those older acolytes seemed to have given a laugh instead.

Not long after, more and more of those participants, who had failed, were starting to spawn in the middle of the stage before they were led to the side toward another set of stairs where the failee sat. Only about ten to fifteen minutes had elapsed but looking at the steady stream of acolytes, it appeared there were only less than a hundred teams of acolytes left fighting off the wave of orcs.

Magus Xion wasn't listening to the host as his eyes darted at the diminishing number of screens looking for a particular boy. His focus, however, had gotten disturbed when his name had been called by someone.

"Xion! I'm glad to see you here!" a bulky man approached him with a smile, but the other magus beside the bulky man had a very sour expression.

"Hello, Darius. And to you too... Urix..." said Magus Xion returning a bright smile to Darius, while on the other hand, he made sure to sound unhappy when he had mentioned the name of the other person.

Magus Xion always enjoyed Darius' company, but the guy next to him was someone he despised. Magus Urix, a magus instructor, the same as him, only this Urix was from Light Institute.

In terms of appearance, Magus Urix was a bit similar to Magus Xion too. Magus Urix also became a magus at a young age, but he had long blonde hair and was wearing a full-white robe.

Magus Darius sat beside Magus Xion, making the two young magi sit on his two sides.

"It's rare to see you here... Xion. Are you perhaps finally interested in looking for a talent whom you'll be taking care of?" said Magus Urix. His voice sounded a bit light and mellow.

Magus Xion's brows twitched a bit and said, "As matter of fact, yes, I am."

"Wow! Among these acolytes which are not of the elites? Haha, it sounds like you have too much time to spare. Aren't you wasting your time like this?" said Magus Urix.

"What about you? I've noticed how your faction always seems to be looking for more acolytes to join. Tell me, how many has your faction recruited this year?"

"Haha, I am not sure, but I can assure you no one from these bunch of losers. We only take elites and if we're lucky, one or two from the privileged class," replied Magus Urix.

Oblivious to the two magi beside him, Darius pointed at the large floating screen and shouted, "Alright! It seems we are not late! The best moment is almost here!"

Magus Urix first turned his attention to the screen, then down to the newly spawned defeated acolytes and lastly to the row of acolytes who had failed before clicking his tongue. "Level three has just started but that many have already been eliminated? Huh, the acolytes are just getting worse each year."

Magus Xion's eyes appeared sharp for a moment and said with a slightly impatient tone, "It's better to judge when the game has finished. We should see their quality from the best of them, not from the worst."

"What quality are you talking about? Look at that team on the top-left most corner, there's only five of them left, I bet they won't last five minutes," said Magus Urix.

Following the trail of Magus Urix's finger, Magus Xion finally found the boy he was looking for earlier. He squinted his eyes and smiled inwardly as he said, "I bet they can last until the next level."

Darius suddenly became excited hearing this. "Aha! A bet! Now this is what I am talking about!"

Hearing such commotion, another magus approached them. A blue robed beautiful woman with long hair appeared behind them, together with another magus who had purple robes. They were Magus Carla from the Water Institute and Magus Minerva.

Magus Carla came forward with her hands on her hips and said, "What are the two of you have been bickering about?"

"Ah, our lovely colleagues are here!" said Darius. "It's nothing much, Carla. They're just betting on the acolytes team"

Magus Minerva said, "A bet? I love to bet. What are we betting on spirit stones or artifacts?"

Not wanting to lose face in front of such a beautiful woman, Magus Urix had no choice but to accept Magus Xion's challenge. Magus Urix once more stared at the screen where Emery and his friends were fighting and said, "I don't see anything special among that group. And with only five of them they will not make it to the top 50."

Hearing it Darius suddenly complained "Hey, Urix! Aren't you raising the bar of the bet too much?"

Magus Urix lightly coughed and didn't pay heed to Magus Darius' comment, even though what that person said was true. Passing level three and getting amongst the top 50 teams was indeed much more difficult than lasting for more than five minutes.

"Well, think about it. If that team doesn't make it to the top 50 we won't see them on the next stage. Hence, this bet won't be as exciting as it can be, will it? I'll bet 100 thousand spirit stones they won't make it. Do you dare?"

"Wow Urix, you are so shameless, aren't you?" commented Darius on the side.

"It's fine, Darius. I agree with this bet," said Magus Xion with confidence.

Minerva found the team the two were betting on and realized those were second year acolytes from her class. She decided to join the bet and said, "Me too. I'll join in the bet."

Magus Urix smirked and said, "You both are crazy."

Darius clapped, taking all the attention to him. "Okay, now that's settled, look! The main event is about to start."

The projections on the screens zoomed out and shifted, showing the prospective from the orc's side. It showed the acolytes fighting against the orcs, the orb in the background and, further behind the orb, the stone bridge at the end opening up and showing its light.

The acolytes who were already struggling against the attacks from the orcs on one side suddenly grew panicky to see the door from the other side of the bridge had opened as well. And, very much like the first stone gate, waves of orcs in rows of six started coming out of it!

The two waves of orcs, one from the front and another from the back, including the sudden surprise, meant the challenge difficulty had become thrice as much!

Because of the increased difficulty, more and more teams on-screen were losing and, within minutes, more orbs blew up and more light beams appeared in the courtyard.

Not far from where Magus Xion was seating, a group of magus were talking.

"Now, this is an exciting fight. Too bad it's not real though. Have you heard the last news? they have been talking about using these virtual arenas for the pillars project."

"More virtuals? Damn I hate that thought, what is the council thinking! We all know that the best talents are only born from real life and death battles!"

"Can't argue with that. They even think about making these virtual easier. So not as to make it too difficult for the lower worlds you see."

"That's crazy."

Chapter 162: Emery's Strength

Thunderous thudding like a powerful beating heart as well as deep roaring resounded from the other end of the bridge. All five youths at the same time received a notification through the symbol on their hands straight into their vision.

[Level 4 - The Horde]

[Endless waves of resilient orcs. The true terror of these savages, defend the orb at all cost!]

Once again, they were reminded of the main task they had to do. Protect the orb from any hostile forces threatening its destruction, not stopping the enemy from crossing the bridge.

The smarter and more insightful acolytes would have guessed it the moment they had arrived in this bridge. There were two sides to the bridge, but only one side had been flooding out enemies, it meant the other side would also start pushing out enemies eventually.

Unfortunately, Emery and his friends hadn't considered this at first, so they had dedicated all their attention to one side of the bridge, where the virtual enemies were coming out of, failing to make any preparations on the other side. Their minds had been too occupied with defending against the coming orcs with their limited members to worry about anything else. And now that another group of orcs came from the other side of the bridge they were all shocked.

Klea, standing near the orb, far from the defensive line the three youths had made, became worried at the nearing orcs that seemed no less than the ones they were facing on the front. She said, "So, what's the plan guys?"

While still fighting in line formation, Julian glanced at the incoming orcs behind him and said, "Dammit! This is impossible. It's hard enough to keep this line as it is, but being flanked from behind... this is gonna be extremely hard!"

"Barbarian! Can you and Emery hold this side just the two of you while I make my way there?"

"Fuck! If you can defend the other side by yourself, of course I can take care of this side t—"

An orc's club threw Thrax back rolling on the bridge. Spitting out blood, he smashed the ground with the face of his shield as he looked red in rage. It really looked like he wanted to rush back in again, but after noticing how his protective vest had lost all its reserved power, he just let out a shout to express his current feeling.

A bluish light though suddenly covered him and some wounds on his face started disappearing. It was Klea using her water elemental spell [Soothing Mist] to heal him from the back.

"This is not about you against me, Barbarian! Stop being a complete idiot right now!" roared Julian to the Thrax, who was still pounding the ground now with the back end of his spear. He then kept switching his attention at the back and at the front. Apparently, he wasn't sure if he could defend the back side by himself.

"I'll defend the other side," said Emery out of nowhere after pulling out his sword that slit the throat of the orc he was facing. Julian, however, didn't reply as he simply glanced at Emery and looked hesitant once more. Not waiting for anyone's approval though, Emery quickly finished off one of the downed orcs and hurried toward the other side of the bridge, where the orcs were about 150 meters away.

"Chumo! Help out Emery," shouted Julian. As Emery ran past Chumo, the two gave a knowing nod. Chumo didn't turn around and let out another [Dark Missile] piercing into the eye socket of the orc that was about to hit Thrax once again.

Emery stopped within a twenty-meter distance before the orcs in a span of less than a minute. Not far away from him there were six tall ugly orcs standing shoulder to shoulder with their weapons raised high. He knew each of these savage creatures were comparable to him in physical strength even in their virtual forms; his advantage regarding skills and weaponry alone wouldn't be sufficient to face half a dozen orcs at the same time.

So, deciding that it was now time to put out all the stops, Emery raised both his swords, casted [Darkness Infusion] and a dark flame-like glow appeared at the tip of the swords and soon covered both swords completely! The aura then got pulled back, making the tier 2 sword glow black, before the aura became extremely thin. As for the sword he had received from Magus Xion, its dark body became even darker as if it looked almost like a shadow! The sword dark body became even darker, as if it was absorbing all the light in its surroundings!

Now that the six orcs were only a few steps before him, Emery roared as he used one of his hidden abilities!

[Fey bloodline activated]

[Battle power has increased by 10]

[Battle power 44]

Emery's whole body contracted as his face, neck, chest, hands and legs became hairy! Then, the black tattoos crept their way up from his chest like snakes, covering every part of his body. He gave a rough snarl, as he could feel himself being full of murderous intent once again. The blood in his vein was

running amok and the only thing that felt like could calm him down was the desire to kill the threats in front of him.

Klea, Chumo, Thrax and Julian all turned their attention towards Emery. At first they thought a new type of enemy had arrived to help the orcs. But after they saw the half-human figure was wielding two swords and was facing the orcs, they all started to understand. They couldn't believe that Emery was hiding such a secret! They had never known of this. It was so surprising Julian almost got hit by the orc in front of him if it weren't for Chumo, who seemed to have recovered first and shot a dark arrow.

"Whaaatt?" all four of them said underneath their breaths, gaping in awe. Emery could hear that due to his enhanced senses in this form. Then they froze again the moment Emery started showing his prowess.

The ground on Emery's feet issued small cracks, as he kicked off showing a speed that passed the orcs by a couple of levels. Although he knew he was still lacking in comparison to their physical strength, Emery remembered that it wasn't due to the difference in physical strength that he had first won against an actual orc. It was his speed increasing the weight behind his attack!

Before using the spells, the tier three Reunite sword could only cut and stab through orcs' thick skin, now, infused with the proper usage of the [Dark Infusion] spell, it could cut through two orcs' heads at the same time! Adding that to his increased strength and speed, he started to see the orcs more like prey rather than threats.

Emery twisted his body mid-air, using the body of the orc behind the first wave as his stepping wall, and shot himself back toward the first wave of orcs, managing to slice off their legs at the same time. The orcs fell face-flat on the ground without even understanding exactly what had happened.

There were only two orcs remaining on the first row and he repeated his pattern of jumping with great speed and decapitating! Heads started to roll and cut limbs flew everywhere! If this wasn't a virtual battle and the spurting blood from the enemies also disappeared after they dissipated into particles of light, Emery would surely have been bathing in the orcs' blood too!.

All of Emery's actions happened only in a span of a few seconds! So, his friends who were watching the scene looked as if they were watching a dream unfold before them. Then, as one of the orcs before Emery let out a deafening roar, they were pulled out of the dream-like state and their shock changed pace immediately into awe and excitement! The person whom they had once thought as the weakest link in the team was actually culling the ugly creatures so fast as if these orcs were just grains being harvested! The four youths' all came to a conclusion to themselves that they couldn't let him take all the glory! So, everyone's morale burned!

Julian and Thrax let out a battle cry, deciding not to hold back anymore! Their weapons let out great tongues of flame! They had both also decided to use their [Fire Infusion] spells before charging with weapons high just like Emery!

The two rivals became a bit reckless for they were showing a bit more openings, however, whenever they were in danger or some of the orcs passed through the defensive line of Thrax and Julian, Chumo's [Dark Missile] as well as Klea's [Wind Sphere] with the occasional [Chain Lighting] sent the orcs to their demise!

The group now then become preoccupied fighting with their all against these endless waves of orcs flooding out the two stone gates. They didn't have a moment to spare the exploding orbs from their neighboring bridges as well as the notification about the number of teams decreasing.

[73 teams remaining]

[72 teams remaining]

From 100 teams a few minutes earlier to under 80 teams, the number had dropped so fast since level 4 had come. But when it reached the 60s, the decrease started to slow down and seemed to stop.

Chapter 163: All Out

In warfare or in any battle, the thing that leaders most needed aside from the tactics and strategies were the people's morale. Hence, due to the actions of Emery's, that made the four youth's morale shoot up, they were able to push back the waves of orcs to a manageable extent. Because of this, they were able to take a bit of a breather and finally noticed the information about the number of teams decreasing.

[67 teams remaining]

This time it took about seven long minutes before another team was eliminated. It was unsettling not knowing whether their situation was better or worse than the other teams.

"[Mudwall]!" Emery cast to momentarily stop the orcs behind the row he was currently facing. He could only do this whenever he lost concentration of controlling his flow of energy through the [Darkness Infusion] spell. Of course, the orcs were still able to smash the walls made out of mud into hundreds of pieces, but the spell still managed to uphold its purpose. Stopping the next row of orcs to join with the ones he was fighting against and giving him a few crucial seconds.

If it weren't because of the artifacts, the tier three spells and their becoming rank 6 acolytes, they would have long been defeated for sure. Probably at the moment when these orcs had first appeared, because each of these orcs had the capabilities to match them in a one on one fight if they still had the same power of when they had just returned to the Academy.

If they were to let up and had the orb destroyed, their tenacity for lasting this long would be considered well achieved, since Emery and his friend were just five people, comparing them to those who had full teams or just more than them, they had already done pretty well.

[66 teams remaining]

Emery believed he was fighting at the top of his ability right now. His sword skills combined with a tier three sword covered with the darkness element from the infusion spell slashed through countless rows of orcs. He had even already used his hidden bloodline skills, but he had never for once thought of trying to achieve the second level of his bloodline. Firstly he wasn't even sure about how to activate it, secondly, he had seen the aftermath when he had fallen to that rage. Little to no recollection, he wouldn't want that, he was concerned about what he might do to his friends or the people around him. Looking at their situation, Emery felt his four friends had used all the tricks up their sleeves.

Since the next row of orcs were a bit further, Emery also checked out the number of remaining teams. He had broadly calculated the overall strength of the second year acolytes' equipment from the number of teams that had been eliminated with each level.

On level one and level two, it was clear that every team had at least tier two weapons. Tier two weapons were able to injure both the goblins and hobgoblins. But as soon as level three started, those who still had tier two weapons had surely fallen off, since tier two weapons weren't enough to kill an orc.

That meant the first few teams, who had been eliminated during the third level, were those who hadn't received any support or had tier three weapons. And from the looks of it, level four would probably be the last level, because it was prohibited to bring equipment above tier three. So, this meant that once the teams had reached level four, this game was all about personal skills and teamwork tactics.

Unfortunately, despite his belief in the team, there were only five of them and the other teams would probably be more than them. And with the state that they were in right now, if there was a level five, Emery wasn't sure if their tier three weapons would be able to handle what was about to come.

In the back of his head, Emery started to imagine what state they would be in now, if the three Zaiueo acolytes were with them. Things would probably be much easier or probably not. Emery couldn't come to a conclusion. But when he noticed his friends on the other side were slightly being pushed back, he knew they wouldn't last much longer.

His carelessness of looking back though made him suffer. A blow from one of the orcs managed to hit him, sending him back a couple of steps.

Clank!

[Protective energy 52/100]

After reading through the remaining energy his tier two armor had, he decided to focus on what was in front of him and not let any more attacks land on him. He shouldn't rely on these items to give him extra lives. And he was sure both Julian and Thrax conditions were much worse, especially Thrax.

"[Chain lightning]!" Crackling emerged from the tip of Klea's staff and burned the back to back orcs that were starting to pile up. Her spell was so effective that it burned through three rows.

The people watching behind the screen were amazed to see this. Usually, a rank 6 acolyte in their second year in the Magus Academy was only able to perform tier three spells two to three times before their spirit energy ran out. Klea though seemed to be an exception for they had seen her do more than five now!

And her spell seemed to be more powerful than the typical. Everytime her spell blasted one side of the battle and at least half a dozen of those orcs would die or be heavily wounded. Such acts had always given each side a moment of breather they badly needed.

But after she let out the latest chain lightning, Klea's breathing started to become uneven. She needed to rest. And this was where Chumo suddenly stepped up.

Chumo stood in front of Klea. He did a hand gesture and cast a spell.

[Shadow self - unique tier 3 - Darkness spell]

Beneath Chumo, his shadow seemed to boil for a moment and the shadow rose up.

It had its own black bow and when Chumo looked as if he was drawing an arrow from his own bow, the shadow mimicked him. The spirit arrow from his bow flew and the shadow figure also did the same. Chumo could now shoot twice as many orcs than before. He probably had shot at least a hundred spirit arrows, which in itself was also a great feat. However, based on his exasperated expression, he seemed to be at hit limit too.

[63 team remaining]

[62 team remaining]

They had all come to an agreement to try and reach top fifty; just when they needed twelve more teams to fall, a scream broke out.

Thrax's upper right shoulder had a spear sticking out! One of the orcs he was fighting managed to get past Thrax's defense and pierced him right on the shoulder.

As blood spurted out, Thrax finally knelt but still tried to fight back with his spear in his right hand. Then, a whistling spear tore the air but a large clank resounded!

Chumo suddenly appeared behind Thrax and lifted Thrax's shield, which Thrax had difficulty lifting after his left shoulder had been injured, to deflect the incoming spear.

Then, Chumo reappeared at the back line once again with Thrax and Klea nearby. He has saved Thrax once again using his shadow step.

After pulling out the spear, Chumo laid Thrax down to rest just next to the crystal while Klea started healing him again. But apparently after being constantly healed by the same spell the result wasn't as effective anymore.

And now with only Julian on the first defensive line, he was quickly being pushed back by the orcs.

Emery noticed the situation and decided to shout out, "Gather up and stay close to each other!"

The four friends complied and stood next to the floating orb. And the orcs had finally come very close, almost 100 of orcs had surrounded them from two sides.

"Tell me you have a plan, Emery," said Julian, continuously casting [Mudwall] just to give them a precious few seconds.

Emery then stood in the middle of the four and closed his eyes. He was channeling his dark core this time to his most known element out of three. The plant element.

The thunderous steps and roaring of the orcs distracted him. But as he kept his focus deeper and deeper, they grew faint like sounds on the background, something insignificant. His sense regarding the ground though became more evident as he could feel the shadow on their legs.

Right now, Emery was attempting to infuse his plant element with the darkness element and use [Entangle]. He succeeded as plants magically grew from the edge of the bridge and snatched on to the orcs' feet. However, it wasn't strong enough for it to get completely crushed afterward.

Looking at the roots, he could see that he had actually failed to merge them. He tried once more, the roots crept out but suddenly, the roots became decayed and started with the shadow. Underneath the shadow of all orcs though, creeping dark roots came and once again snatched at all the hundred orcs at once!

[Dark Root Binding - tier 3]

[Plant and darkness spell that holds down the creature and gives the binded creature a curse that weakens them]

Emery's veins were showing on his face. He was giving all his to control all the hundred roots that bind the orcs!

"Now is the chance! Kill them all now!" screamed Emery in pain.

Chapter 164: Top 50

[61 teams remaining]

Hundreds of jet black thorny vines emerged from the ground and were immediately seen entangling the orcs' feet, immobilizing their movement. Droplets of sweat began to drip off Emery's face as he used all the spirit energy he could muster, withstanding the pressure that he received from immobilizing a hundred of orcs, that were currently seen bound by his new darkness-infused plant spell called [Dark Root Binding].

With his arms stretched out toward the both ends of the bridge while his eyes slowly turned bloodshot, Emery's Fey Transformation had long since faded, revealing his normal appearance, except for his disorganized hair; so that he could focus all the concentration he had on just this moment.

The orcs, who were immobilized, roared at the top of their lungs until their roars thundered across the bridge, shaking the eardrums of those who heard it. However, their roars gradually diminished as they felt their bodies weaken and their strength gradually dissipated.

In fact, their strength didn't dissipate, but was absorbed due to the secondary effect of the new spell Emery had cast, which slowly sapped their strength and used it to strengthen the vines that paralyzed them.

However, despite the fact that the spell could absorb its host's energy and theoretically could strengthen itself indefinitely, it still could easily be broken if the spell was not controlled and assisted in its initial phase where it was still weak.

The [Dark Root Binding] spell not only kept the orcs' legs from moving, it also gradually crept up to their torso and arms, making their way to completely paralyze their target. As long as the jet black vines continued to cling to their body parts, they would find that their bodies would remain extremely difficult to move. Thanks to that, Emery didn't need to keep assisting the spell any longer if it past certain point.

Seeing the golden opportunity where the orcs were immobilized by Emery's spell and couldn't do anything, Julian immediately jerked his legs and dashed towards the paralyzed orcs while brandishing his sword and shield. When he reached one of the orcs, he immediately thrust his sword which was backed by the momentum of his sprint, towards the orc's head. The poor orc tried its best to move its body, but in the end it could only see the sword approaching its head helplessly.

Stab! *Thud*

The orc's body quickly fell to the ground as Julian drew his sword from the now dead orc. After that, he continued his assault and began to kill the orcs one by one. At the same time, one could faintly see a black shadow flickering around the orcs as they began to fall with slash wounds to their necks. Apparently, Chumo also began to do his massacre as he casted his [Shadow Step] which greatly increased his mobility.

However, dozens of orcs continued to flood the bridge and began to overwhelm Emery and his friends. When the first batch of orcs was successfully killed, Emery could only take a short rest before he needed to once again cast his [Dark Root Binding] spell.

Thanks to the support Emery's spell had provided, Klea currently felt that her burden had been lifted a lot. Turning her head towards the sweaty Emery, Klea smiled and said, "Emery, that's a very awesome spell. I always knew that you are special."

Hearing that, Emery was not sure if he was in the mood for her usual tease as he could feel that the new spell was still very unstable right now. Therefore, he had to maintain his concentration, otherwise the spell's backlash could easily injure him badly.

Currently, Emery began to feel pain wrecking throughout his entire body as he continued to cast the [Dark Root Binding] spell over and over. Due to the sheer number of orcs that he needed to immobilize, Emery put an extreme burden on his spirit energy which resulted in his current state. Gritting his teeth, Emery forced himself to go beyond his limit and kept channeling spirit energy to his spell as he waited for more teams to get eliminated.

[56 team remaining]

[55 team remaining]

Finally, Emery hit his limit. He put down his arm that was currently felt as heavy as holding two large boulders. When Emery's arms were put down, the spell finally stopped.

Because of that, the orcs who were paralyzed by the vines began to break free and attacked Julian and Chumo who had been killing their brethren. Slowly but surely, Julian and Chumo were being pushed back by the waves of orcs to the orb's location.

Feeling his wounds had improved, Thrax also stood up as he prepared himself to join the fight again. As the three of them watched their retreating friends and approaching orcs, Emery thought that this was their last stand that would decide whether they would succeed or fail.

All of the protective energy possessed by their protective vests was all gone except for Klea and Chumo's. They also didn't have much spirit energy or stamina left. Their current situation could be said to be bad, extremely bad.

But strangely enough, in a desperate moment such as this, Emery suddenly forgot to continue checking the counter that showed the number of the remaining team. When the group regrouped, Emery suddenly felt an indescribable connection between him and his four other friends that made him smile faintly. Accompanied by his four other friends, all of them fought together, shoulder-to-shoulder, against the sea of orcs as they tried their best to hold their ground.

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[52 team remaining]

By now, the five of them had been cornered so that they were only a few steps away from the floating orb. Seeing the situation, Emery decided to risk himself and go further inside the hordes and fought there to lower the pressure that his friends endured.

"Emery?! That's dangerous! Return here right now!"

With his protective vest also broken, Emery immediately used his [Granite Skin]. Without considering the aspect of defense anymore, Emery began to unleash everything he got at the orcs. The orcs felt as if the hell had landed upon them when they received Emery's relentless yet vicious attacks.

Seeing the valiant visage that Emery showed, the strength and persistence he displayed against the endless row of orcs brought the last boost of morale that they needed. They kept fighting against the orcs, preventing them from reaching the orb; until finally, what they were waiting for has come.

[50 team remaining]

[Congratulations! You have successfully passed the first stage of Magus Game!]

With that announcement, the dozens of orcs who were already so close on killing them suddenly stopped their movement and their figure slowly disappeared into particles of light.

Seeing that, the group immediately dropped their butt to the ground and lay on the bridge like a lifeless corpse. After a moment of silence, loud shouts suddenly resounded on the bridge.

"WE DID IT!!!"

"YEAH!!!"

"WE DID IT!!! WE DID IT!!!"

Even though their bodies were so exhausted, they still couldn't help but be excited when they saw that they managed to pass the first stage. Suddenly, Klea began to laugh by herself without any particular reason. And then, one by one, they started to laugh together as to applaud their achievement today.

[Level 5 - will start in 5 minutes]

"???"

The whole group was shocked by the sudden announcement. A clear confusion appeared on their faces as their mind thought the same thing, 'WHAT IS THIS??'

They thought the stage was already done. But then, they realized that there was never an announcement that stated they had secured the orb.

"ARGH! Is this not going to stop until everyone is killed?"

"We still get

"We are still in the next stage whether we win this one or not, right?"

"Who knows?"

The group immediately made the best of their five minutes to recover their fighting ability. When Klea's [Soothing Mist] was no longer effective to heal their wounds, Emery swiftly abused his [Nature Blessing] spell.

The spell not only could heal their wounds, but it also could restore a little of their strength and calm their minds. This wasn't a very effective spell for people who were badly injured, but for a situation like this it was very useful.

Julian and Thrax stared at Emery in awe when they saw Emery casted the spell and healed them.

"Who are you? What did you do to Emery?" asked the two of them jokingly.

"Well... Maybe you don't really know your friend." replied Emery with a teasing smile. He then continued, "But honestly, guys... I think this is the last spell that I can cast."

When the others were about to open their moment, a notification suddenly appeared on the orb. All of them then quickly stood around the orb, waiting for their opponents.

[Level Five - Extra Level]

[Objectives to be cleared to receive the extra team point]

[Successfully Defend the Orb]

[Kill the Boss Creature]

[Survive Against the Wave]

"Alright, guys. We will get all the reward we could get. We can do this!" said Julian firmly, but it seemed that the latter part was directed to himself.

When the others were about to open their moment, a notification suddenly appeared on the orb. All of them then quickly stood around the orb, waiting for their opponents.

[Level Five - Extra Level]

[Objectives to be cleared to receive the extra team point]

[Successfully Defend the Orb]

[Kill the Boss Creature]

[Survive Against the Wave]

"Alright, guys. We will get all the reward we could get. We can do

Chapter 165: Level 5

On top of a stone bridge, surrounded by pitch black darkness, a group of five people were pointing their weapons towards one end of the bridge, where a massive stone gate stood. The expression on their faces were as if there was a great enemy ahead of them.

A moment later, a figure came out of the gate, followed by an immense pressure that immediately strafed them. A loud sound echoed through the air as the figure stomped its feet to the ground.

The figure was three times the size of an orc while its height reached four meters. But the most noticeable feature of the figure was its two bald heads, that were both staring right at them.

[Twin Headed Ogre]

[Battle power 100]

GROWL!

The monstrous size of the ogre made its frame take almost a quarter of the bridge. When it walked, each step made the bridge shake violently as if a dozens of tanks were passing through it simultaneously.

The giant creature had a few metal plates on its body, to be precise on its shoulders, legs and arms. Meanwhile, its torso was left bared open, showing its large chest and chiseled abdominal muscles.

There were a lot of parts on its body that were not covered by those plates, but Emery could tell its skin and flesh were not to be underestimated. For its weapon, the ogre had a metal club as big as a pillar and covered with sharp edges.

When he saw the creature approaching and rocking the bridge in the process, Emery was flabbergasted, at a loss for words, while his mouth went wide open.

Mechanically turned his head around, Julian asked his friends, "Anyone has any idea?"

"..."

Seeing the same expression he had before, Emery shook his head wryly. Meanwhile, the sound grew louder as the figure drew closer.

THUMP *THUMP* *THUMP*

"There must be a way... A weakness we can take advantage of" muttered Emery.

Standing next to the floating orb, Emery then noticed there was a timer on it. 10 minutes and still counting down. Comparing the information he just received with the notification about this level, Emery's mind flew through a hundred thoughts, trying to find a connection. Then, a conjecture came to his mind, he believed the difficulty of this level was actually divided into two.

The Defend the Orb and Kill the Boss Creature were two different objectives. If they were able to kill the creature, it meant they would succeed in defending the orb. However, the same cannot be said otherwise.

Emery quickly thought of their chances of completing both objectives. With their current team condition, it was probably impossible to kill the boss monster. Thus, they might as well just try to complete the easier one, rather than not getting any at all.

With that decision, the pressure on Emery's back eased a little, but he still couldn't relax. In order to complete the objective to prevent the ogre from reaching the orb as the priority, they needed to apply a different strategy. With the goal to hold out for 10 minutes, Emery immediately brewed a plan in his mind.

After Emery told his plan to others, the five of them swiftly got into their position. Instead of defending and placing themselves on the low ground, Emery decided to take the initiative and approach the monster. This way, they could choose how they attack and prevent the monster from coming closer to the orb. And then, they would find a way to hold the creature back or at least slow it down.

The five of them immediately dashed towards the ogre before it could reach any closer to the orb. When they reached it, they immediately casted their spells aiming to hinder and restrain the monster.

Julian immediately casted his [Mudwall] spell as the familiar scene of the rising clay wall once again appeared. However, without even the need to bash it, the ogre just walked past the barrier with ease. The wall was immediately brought down by its body and crumbled into pieces.

Another purplish light exuded from Klea's magic staff as she chanted her [Wind Sphere] spell. When she finished the chant, Klea immediately aimed the ball of wind towards the ogre and fired it.

The condensed wind sphere immediately whizzed in the air and hit the ogre, making it stagger for a second before it returned to its normal self, as if nothing happened. The same could be said of Chumo's [Spirit Missile], which only left a faint mark on the ogre's skin.

Seeing all the spells that could easily one shot the orcs couldn't even put a dent in the creature they wavered. The brave yet reckless Thrax seemed hesitant to charge in like he always did. At the moment, they finally realized the creature's 100 battle power was not a joke after all.

"This is an impossible mission, isn't it? Is this all supposed to just make us all lose?" Julian said angrily.

THUMP *THUMP* GROWL!

When the others fell into despair, Chumo, who was always silent, suddenly decided to speak out.

"Guys, I can try something to buy time for us. Wish me luck."

Before the others could digest his words, Chumo immediately moved. This time, instead of attacking from a distance using long-range spells, Chumo decided to use his [Shadow Step] spell and began to run around the monster's massive hit, attacking and annoying the two-headed ogre like a buzzing fly.

The giant was getting more and more annoyed by Chumo's actions. Therefore, it decided to stop its step and began to focus its attacks at Chumo. Deafening sounds reverberated in the air as the ogre slammed its club and fists at Chumo, which then landed on the bridge.

Even though he managed to dodge the ogre's attack, Chumo still had to put his guard up as each of the monster's attacks was not slower than Chumo's speed. The ogre tried its best to smack the annoying fly that harassed it. Unfortunately, because of his large frame and Chumo's erratic steps, the ogre didn't manage to land a single blow.

When Chumo saw the ogre had begun to get used to his speed and rhythm, he immediately used his [Shadow Self] spell and began to cooperate with his shadow to move around the monster's legs, confusing the ogre again. The ogre was truly confused by Chumo's actions that its two head crashed into each other when they tried to keep track of him.

Seeing the spectacle, Thrax and Julian shouted excitedly, "Good job, Chumo!"

Currently, the two heads of the monster seemed to be arguing with each other, using their own strange language that sounded like a combination of gibberish and growls. When Klea looked at that, an idea suddenly appeared on her mind. She then proceeded to tell Emery about it.

Hearing the plan, Emery's face turned weird as he asked, "Will it work though?"

"It's not like we have another plan" replied Klea shrugging her shoulders.

BAM!!! ROAR!

At the same time, the monster was finally able to land a blow on its prey as it roared excitedly. Unfortunately for it and luckily for the group, when it raised its club, it found all that was crushed was only Chumo's shadow.

Emery agreed to Klea's plan when he saw how close Chumo was to death. When he saw that Chumo finally could not hold on anymore, he gestured to Klea.

Receiving Emery's signal, she immediately casted a spell on the monster. But this time, it wasn't an offensive or defensive elemental spell. It was her unique spell that got her accepted into the illusion institution.

[Enchantment]

Chapter 166: Enchantment

Apart from having the institute of elements, Magus Academy also had the institute of paths. Different from its counterparts that dedicated themselves on the researches into the intricacy and mystery of the ten natural elements, the institute of paths specialized on the studies regarding any special and specific talent that an individual could have. The prime examples of institutes of paths were the institute of restoration, destruction, divination, evocation, illusion, and the list still went on.

Apparently, Klea had discovered that she had special affinity talents in the path of illusion and enchantment, thus the reason she was invited to the said institution. Ever since she became the member of the institute, Klea had quickly become the institute's favorite acolyte due to her talent and personality.

When she saw the two ogre heads arguing with each other only because of an unintentional incident, Klea believed that she could influence the ogre's thought, or at least one of its heads. Sure of her thinking, Klea immediately raised her hand and casted the spell when she saw Emery gave her a go.

[Enchantment]

Faint pinkish circle immediately appeared on top of the ogre unbeknownst by it. The spell then began to do its magic. The effect of the spell was to trick the target's senses and affect their minds, amplifying their emotions and muddling their thoughts. Which in this case, made the two ogre heads even more furious to each other and their argument grew even harder.

Seeing the spell Klea casted, Emery and the others were amazed. With this [Enchantment] spell in effect, they could easily manage to buy a few minutes for themselves.

When Emery thought how easy the monster fell prey to Klea's spell, he couldn't help but think deeply about the reason when he suddenly came into an understanding. It actually made much sense that the ogre was easily affected by Klea's spell, especially the one she used.

The creature possessed terrifying defense, immense strength and unstoppable momentum, which granted its title of having 100 battle power. How could a group of young acolytes, not even official mage, bring down this damn abomination?

It seemed that the weakness that they could try to take advantage of lay in the mind of the creature, or rather its intelligence, which was quite low when compared to other beings of the same level.

Julian had the thought of attacking the creature when it was still in such condition. However, Klea quickly rejected the idea because she was afraid the spell would be more difficult to control when it felt its life was being threatened. And if that happened, Klea was almost hundred percent sure that the ogre would spiral out of control and rampage around its surrounding due to its uncontrollable emotions and muddled thought..

After a few minutes, Klea finally felt she was unable to keep the spell anymore and said, "Guys, I can't hold it much longer. Be prepared."

Seeing the remaining time left for them, Emery wasn't sure they could last until that time ran out. The unstoppable momentum that the ogre previously showed made him think that they might not be able to hold the ogre back, despite using all their might.

Emery immediately fell into deep thought, trying to think of a way. A moment later, an idea suddenly came to his mind that made him want to slap his forehead hard. He then quickly voiced it.

"Klea, what if you tell the ogre to jump off the bridge? Can you do that?"

The others who heard that were dumbfounded by the unexpected question. Then, they began to hit themselves for not having thought of this idea earlier.

Hearing that, Klea nodded and replied, "I'll try."

Actually, the spell immediately became much more difficult to use if the user wanted to order the target to act on their command. The chance of success was also quite low compared to when the spell was used only to influence the target's emotions.

Even so, Klea still tried her best so as to not disappoint her friends. Thanks to that, her face gradually turned pale while beads of cold sweat started to fall from her face. A few seconds later, Klea suddenly

said, "I did it!" Even though she looked pale, a wide smile still adorned her face which showed how happy she was.

Emery and the others immediately casted their eyes toward the ogre when they heard her words. In the distance, they could see the ogre starting to move towards the edge of the bridge, one step at a time. When the creature was at the edge of the bridge, just one step away from falling into the endless darkness, the ogre finally became alarmed by the sight before it and managed to break free from the spell's effect.

However, Emery and his friends obviously would not let this golden opportunity pass by just like that. As if their thoughts had become one, the four boys immediately attacked the ogre together.

Julian and Thrax immediately used their [Fire Infusion] spell as their sword and spear swiftly engulfed by streams of blazing flame. They then dashed towards the ogre and aimed their weapons towards the back of the creature that wasn't covered in anything.

The attacks managed to hurt the ogre, but it was barely enough to wound its thick skin. The monster, who began to step back from the edge, stomped its feet and swung its club towards Julian and Thorax. Fortunately, the two of them managed to dodge it, albeit barely.

When Chumo went on and decided to attack the ogre, the monster's thought looked like it remembered who he was, the annoying fly. It then decided to ignore the two boys as it redirected its club toward him. Chumo was too tired to use his [Shadow Step] anymore, so the metal club was quickly getting closer and closer to him.

"WATCH OUT!!!" shouted everyone as they saw the club nearly hit Chumo.

Fortunately, or not, the club only grazed Chumo's body as he shifted his body to the side at the last moment. However, the momentum of the graze alone stung his already weak leg and made him fall to the ground. Chumo, now injured and lay on the ground, couldn't do anything as another swing was about to hit him.

In that moment, Emery blamed himself because he couldn't save Chumo anything without his spirit energy. Due to the distance between them, it was too late for him to start running now. If he still had his spirit energy, he could easily cast a spell to blink over and save him.

Chumo, who saw the metal club grow bigger in his sight, could only close his eyes and brace himself for the impact.

BAM!!!

Blood splattered as the club hit its target.

However, Chumo didn't feel any pain when he heard the sound, instead he felt blood fell to his body, which did not belong to him. Opening his eyes, Chumo saw a figure stood, no, knelt above him while the metal club was blocked by his shield.

It was Thrax who blocked the ogre's hit for Chumo. When he saw Chumo thrown backwards, he immediately ran towards him because he saw that the ogre was not finished yet. Luckily, he still managed to block the blow with his shield.

However, upon receiving the attack, the strength of the club made him feel as if he had been hit by a full-speed truck. The impact made him knelt to the ground while blood gushing out of his body, even his round tier 2 shield crack apart. but Thrax kept holding his ground as if he couldn't feel anything.

"Don't you dare hurt my friend, you monster!" shouted Thrax, he threw away the shield and stood up with the help of his spear with a trembling body.

The barbarian might be impulsive and stupid sometime, but at this moment his tenacity is unamatch within the group.

The creature once again raised its club and swung it down towards the two of them. And this time, the attack could definitely end both of them. Julian bashed his shield at the ogre, in order to attract its attention. Alas, it didn't produce any effect at all.

At the last moment, when the club was about to touch the shield and crushed them, a green bottle was seen flying to the monster.

The bottle shattered into pieces when it hit the ogre as green liquid splashed to both of its heads. When the green liquid touched its skin, the ogre immediately screamed in pain.

[Acid Potion - Tier 2 Potion]

Couldn't watch himself doing nothing, Emery quickly thought of the way to save them when suddenly he remembered about his experimental acid potion, the one he made using the rare plant he got from the Duma Beast nest. Taking out the green bottle, Emery quickly threw the bottle towards the ogre with all the strength he could muster.

The ogre screamed in pain as it began to twist its body left and forth and scratched its face, trying to get rid of the green liquid which was causing it pain. Looking at the writhing ogre, Klea immediately spent her last spirit energy to cast one of her strongest spells, [Thunderbolt].

Erratic lightning current swiftly appeared in front of her before it quickly whizzed towards the ogre. The spell pushed the monster back another step closer to the edge while making it paralyze for a moment.

Seeing that, Emery immediately shouted, "Together now!"

Emery, Julian, the limping Chumo, and even the battered Thrax swiftly got up and ran towards the monster. Together, they pushed the ogre with all the remaining strength they had left.

"YAHHHHH!!!" shouted everyone.

The ogre slipped off the edge of the bridge as its body began to fall into the dark abyss.

[Congratulations, you have successfully killed the Ogre]

[Congratulations, you have successfully defended the Orb]

[Calculating your team rank based on the achievement and time remaining...]

[Congratulations, your team is ranked 9th]

Chapter 167: Congratulation

[Congratulations, your team is ranked 9th]

[You will return to the arena in a few minutes]

Seeing the notification, Julian couldn't help but exclaim loudly, "We made it to the top 10! Wow..."

"To be honest, I still can't believe that we really have what it takes to be in the top 10" Julian added in disbelief, after he calmed down.

Even though their entire bodies were aching and screaming in pain, the five young teenagers were still in hysterical ecstasy, in a good way.

The fact they not only managed to make it past the first stage, but even reached the 9th rank out of the 121 teams really made them happy and proud. That was the top 10 for God's sake!

The whole team was very excited thinking about the reward they will receive and the acknowledgment they will earn. Lastly, the most important thing was the face of those acolytes from Kaleos would make when the result was announced.

After laughing until their stomachs hurt and consuming all of their excitement, they looked into each other's eyes, they all realized the ordeal they had experienced together had further strengthened the bond between them. Despite the fact they wouldn't die for real in the virtual arena, each of them tried their very best to make sure no one got killed.

The valiant yet rash Thrax, the calm-headed leader Julian, the swift and decisive Chumo, the adept yet charismatic Klea, and the last but not least the enigmatic and versatile Emery. The five of them were the Earth Magi.

A few minutes later, another notification appeared in front of them.

[All teams have finished the first stage of the Magus Games]

The five of them immediately closed their eyes when a flash of piercing light suddenly appeared and drowned the bridge. The next thing they knew, they were already in some sort of open space that looked like an arena.

The arena looked similar to the one the Combat Institute had, but it was bigger and more exquisite. The ground was covered by engraved quartz slabs that gave an aesthetic feeling to the place, while Emery could see many gates standing in grandeur on the arena walls.

As he threw his gaze to the surroundings, Emery found out there was enough space to let hundreds of thousands of spectators sit here. Currently, most of the seats in the arena were not filled. However, there were at least more than a thousand acolytes and magus watching.

Emery could see all around him there were almost all ten thousand 2nd year acolytes, who had completed the first stage too, just like his group. However, he noticed the acolytes seemed to be divided.

There were only around a third of them standing at the center of the arena, forming a circular formation, while the rest were standing outside, making another circle around them, while facing them.

It was easy to assume the people who were in the center were the top 50 teams of chosen acolytes from all 10 groups.

When he was busy observing the situation, Emery suddenly realized all the wounds he had suffered and those of his friends were all gone. Checking his bag, he was even more surprised that all of his strength paste and acid potions were there, as if he never used them. Experiencing this, Emery couldn't help but think, "This virtual arena can actually be a very valuable tool for conducting tests with items and skills."

A moment later, the familiar blonde haired magus, Serena, walked towards their location. When the acolytes saw her, the previously boisterous and chaotic arena immediately turned so silent, that one could even hear the sound of a pin dropping to the ground. When Magus Serena saw how the acolytes were behaving, she smiled and then announced the results.

"from all 10 groups, there are 1274 teams that participated in the first stage of the Magus Games, only 500 teams are eligible to enter the second stage, with a total number of 3178 acolytes." Selena calmly said. She then continued, "The second stage of the Magus Game will be held 10 days from now."

Hearing that, the successful acolytes excitedly shouted, while clenching their fists in the air, while those who failed were seen lowering their heads with a crestfallen expression. Looking at the clamorous arena, Selena quickly calmed them down and then continued announcing the results.

"Out of the top 500 teams, 98 teams managed to defend the orb to the last second but only 55 of them managed to kill the Ogre"

When he heard the details of the rank, Emery was genuinely satisfied with the result they got. Not only were there only five of them in the team, while the other teams were filled with 7 to 8 people, but he and his group also joined without knowing much about the game beforehand.

A moment later, the crest on his hand provided another piece of information.

[You are part of Team 99 of group 7]

[Personal points: 114]

[Team points: 150]

[Receiving 200 points for successfully defending the orb]

[Receiving 200 points for killing the final boss]

[Receiving 100 points for managing to survive until the end]

[Receiving 200 points for ranking in the top 10]

[Calculating total points...]

[You received 964 points]

[Converting points into contribution points...]

[You received 9640 contribution points]

After that notification, the arena became rowdy once again, as the acolytes became chaotic.

Seeing the large amount of contribution points he received, Thrax couldn't hold himself from shouting loudly, "WOHOO!!! That's a lot of contribution points! Thank you, Magus Academy!!!"

Emery and his friends all received almost the same amount of points, with a few differences here and there. Judging from the way of rewarding in the notification, Emery could deduct there was a huge difference between those who managed to complete the next stage and those who didn't.

The 100 points they received just for managing to survive until the end were converted into 1000 contribution points, which could be exchanged for a full day of access to an origin stone room. With this arrangement, the contrast between the acolytes would become even more visible. The strong would get stronger, while the weak would be left behind.

Realizing that, Emery quickly fell into deep thoughts, as he dwelt on the motives and plans behind the method used in selecting acolytes in the Magus Academy.

On the main podium overlooking the arena, the headmaster, Altus Dresden was accompanied by the academy's official magus. He then got up and stomped his staff again, attracting the attention of those in the arena.

"Congratulations, acolytes! The first trial was a way to see your basic foundation, your teamwork ability and your willpower when faced with an endless challenge. The results have been spoken and those of you who made it will go to the second trial."

The headmaster then looked at one of the arena gates that had just opened.

"As for the second trial that will be held in 10 days, those people will be your opponent."

From behind that gate, groups of acolytes started coming out. When they stopped coming out, Emery saw there were at least 500 people there. And then, in the middle of those acolytes, Emery spotted a familiar figure.

"Silva!"

Chapter 168: Winner

Seeing the group of people who stood in front and separated from them, Emery believed that those five-hundred people were second year acolytes just like them. The reason was that he could see some familiar faces among them.

One of the people he noticed was Silva, the girl who fought with him the night of the Elder Respite incident.

When he saw the demeanor and attitude those people had, combined with the presence of Silva there, Emery was sure these 500 acolytes were from the elite class.

When the acolytes, that were standing in the inner circle of the arena, saw those elite acolytes, the new self-found confidence they just gained after successfully passing the first stage of the Magus Game dispersed like a puff of smoke in the air. Despite the fact they were the top 50 from 10 class group, they still felt insignificant when they saw those people.

They then realized that, from the very beginning, they were only competing with the lowest level of acolytes. And from this moment on, the real competition has begun, which would take place during the second game with those elite acolytes.

After all of the elite acolytes entered the arena, Magus Selina started talking again. Moments later, her voice resumed throughout the arena.

"Acolytes of the Magus Academy! Are. You. Excited??!!" she said loudly, making everyone hear the enthusiasm behind her voice. She then continued, "For the next stage of Magus Game, the theme of the stage will be... a battleground!!! How exciting! Am I right?"

Hearing the unfamiliar term, many acolytes began creating ruckus again. Magus Selena ignored them and continued her explanation. Pointing her finger towards the thousands of acolytes, she said, "It will be the fight between the best acolytes from the normal classes versus the elite class acolytes. Which means the battle will be involving more than 3000 acolytes!!!"

"The battle will continue to rage until only 500 acolytes remain on the stage. Those people will continue to the next stage."

The already rowdy acolytes grew even more clamorous when they heard the explanation of the next stage's theme.

"However, this time, the stage will not be a team game. In order to be selected to the third stage, all of you need to pay attention to your personal points. Of course, you can still form a team if you want, but the points will still count on an individual basis."

"The details about the theme will be soon released. You'll be able to read them on your own."

The sight of thousands of acolytes focused on those 'elites', as if they were about to eat them alive, and the target of those glares, on the other hand, didn't remain still and also threw their own glares back. When the higher-ups noticed the tension between the groups, Altus Dreyden opened his mouth again.

"I'm very glad to announce the second stage has always been my favorite since its introduction to the Magus Game. Therefore, I'm looking forward to seeing your growth in the next 10 days. May the most talented acolytes win!"

After his speech, the headmaster immediately instructed everyone to leave, starting from the group of instructors. As the rows of spectators began to leave the arena, Emery and the others who passed the first stage cheered loudly for their accomplishment.

A few minutes later, the cheers ended and the acolytes began to walk out of the arena, leaving some acolytes who were still ecstatic.

Looking at the acolytes who were getting fewer and fewer, Emery regrouped with his friends to discuss the second stage.

"Looking at the situation, it seems the next stage will be much harder. This time, we need to prepare early and more thoroughly!" Julian said while clenching his fists.

However, another voice immediately rejected the idea. "No, no, no! You Romans are not fun. We will celebrate our win with ale and women today!" Thrax said loudly.

"You Thracians are already drunk when you aren't drinking yet!" rebuked Klea. "But this time I agree with Thrax. Let's stop being too serious for a moment and relax ourselves."

Emery and Chumo nodded in agreement, making so Julian could only helplessly agree. Before heading back to the residence, Emery turned back to check for Silva, but it appeared she had left the arena with the rest of the elite acolytes.

'I guess there is no point for me to look for her.' Emery thought. He was then startled by Julian's shout. "Emery! What are you doing standing there? Let's go!"

"I'm coming!" replied Emery as he ran towards his friends.

Emery and the others walked out of the arena and went through the portal. They then returned back to the mountain area where all the class 77 acolytes resided.

When they reached the residence's courtyard, Magus Minerva was already waiting for them with a big smile on her face.

Clap! Clap! Clap! Clap!

"Congratulations, everyone! I'm sooo happy that so many of you managed to pass to the next round. Aiya, I didn't realize I am such a good mentor."

"..." Everyone just stared dumbfounded at this teacher, who was shamelessly praising herself.

Many of the acolytes, especially the ones who failed, just gave her a long face. Many of them thought their class teacher pretty much didn't do anything for them. However, Emery personally thought of Magus Minerva quite positively. She was just the free-spirited type who didn't like to pretend and be shackled.

"Out of the 13 teams from our class, 4 of them made it to the next stage! Winners! Let's gather up!"

Upon hearing that, the teams in question immediately came to the front. When he looked at the other teams, Emery noticed all of them had Kaleos acolytes among them. And one of the teams was filled by Zaiueo acolytes.

Seeing Emery's group, who managed to reach the top 10, the Zaiueo acolytes immediately approached them and took turns talking.

"Congratulations, guys."

"I congratulate you for reaching the top 10."

"Congratulations from us."

When his friends warmly welcomed the Zaiueo acolytes, Emery could see the Kaleos acolytes looked both surprised and dissatisfied with the fact his group was standing among them, especially Rowe who personally glared at them in discontent.

Their expression turned even more ugly when they heard Emery's team managed to reach the top 10. But when Magus Minerva specifically mentioned how great their team was to manage to get rank 9 and

kill the ogre, their expression became priceless. Emery wished there was a way to capture the image, so they could have a laugh every time they needed it.

On the other hand, it appeared Rowe and the other acolytes didn't even manage to enter the top 30. The stark contrast between them made the Kaleos acolytes' lose face, as they remembered how 'superior' they proclaimed to be.

When Emery thought about their reaction, Klea's gentle hand touched his shoulder. She then said, "Let's not worry about them, Emery." Beside him, Julian added, "Damn right! The harder they stare at us, the happier I feel."

After receiving all the acknowledgement and praise they could get in front the other acolytes, Magus Minerva walked closer to Emery and the others. Still in her jumpy happy mood, she whispered.

"Boys... girls.. Thank you so much for your efforts. I really should reward you with something. Therefore, I will send the best ale and meat for all of you to eat when celebrating."

"However, those things were only for you guys, alright? Don't tell the others about it. They might get the wrong idea."

Emery and the others became speechless when they heard that. Emery wondered if she was still the same person as before.

Chapter 169: Drunk

Later that day, the group was enjoying themselves with the ale and meat sent by Minerva. Thanks to their achievement, they were able to enjoy such a sumptuous feast to celebrate it. Hot piping, freshly cooked food was absolutely incomparable with the food created by the cube.

"Let's drink and get wasted! Today, we will celebrate until midnight!" Thrax said, laughing loudly and looking very happy. He then continued his words raising his glass, "Honestly, I have been to many kinds of battle, but today was the best, guys! Let's drink to that!"

"CHEERS!"

"CHEERS!!!" everyone said.

The feeling of reaching the top from the bottom of the pack was truly a wonderful feeling. Each of them who were celebrating here, were truly euphoric when they thought back to the success they had accomplished.

The sight of Thrax and Julian, the mouse and cat combination, the ever-quarrelling duo, singing and drinking hand in hand, shoulder-to-shoulder, was really a beautiful yet strange sight for Emery, Chumo, and Klea.

Thrax, the drinking bull, kept forcing others to a drinking competition. He challenged everybody on the feast, until he reached Julian and proceeded to challenge him too. Julian, feeling challenged by him, accepted the challenge. Thus, began the sight in front of them

"We, Romans, invented the mead. Therefore, I. WILL. NOT. LOSE."

"Fuck off, Roman... All of you are thieves of history. It was us, the descendants of Greek Gods who invented it." snubbed Thrax.

"Well.. I put my honor on the challenge!"

"The game is on, Roman!!! Who else?" Thrax said, sweeping his gaze around him until it stopped at Chumo. Pointing his finger at him and shouting, "Chumo! You! You, my friend... are you old enough to drink?"

Emery could see that Chumo's expression immediately turned serious when he heard Thrax's provocation. The drinking game became wild, Thrax somehow lured everyone in it. Emery was the first to surrender as he wasn't used to drinking. After a while, the second one to drop dead was Klea. They knew she was wasted when they saw her face became flushed red and she began saying weird and random stuff.

Surprisingly, the third one to drop the ball was Julian, the man who said he would win the game suddenly fell to the ground, unconscious. Thrax, who saw his rival lose, started claiming to have won the game. However, unbeknownst to the reckless bull, Chumo was still there sitting and gulping ale like water with an indifferent expression.

In the end, Thrax dropped drunk to the ground while his expression showed he couldn't believe he lost to Chumo of all the people.

"For your information, my friend. My people have created alcoholic drinks thousands of years before your 'gods' drink them" said Chumo.

Emery, who immediately did a tactical retreat due to his inability to drink alcohol, watched the whole game in excitement. Smiling happily through the feast, Emery thought this was probably one of the happiest moments of his life. Not long after Thrax became wasted and unconscious, Chumo also put down his glass and went to sleep, or maybe he just fell unconscious too, hard to say. All of them just laid down on the living room floor, wasted.

Emery, the one with the least alcohol in his body, was still awake watching the motionless bodies of his friends. He then realized Klea looked very uncomfortable, as her body shuddered due to the cold. Looking at her thin revealing clothes, Emery shook his head helplessly.

Getting up from his seat, Emery quickly picked up her body and carried her into the bedroom. When he laid her down on the bed, he realized Klea was awake. She didn't want to let go of him, instead she pulled him down. Hence, Emery ended on the same bed laying next to her.

"You... you... why did you keep secrets from us, huh?!! Who do you think you are, huh?" Klea said, almost mumbling.

Shaking his head, Emery said, "Klea, you're drunk. You should sleep now." He then tried to get up.

However, a hand stopped him, "Drunk? You drunk? Me? No, I'm not... how can I be drunk?"

Emery knew only a fool would argue with a drunk person. Therefore, he decided to stay silent and let Klea speak all of her gibberish. A few minutes later, Emery saw Klea was finally silent and her eyes were close. He then slowly tried to escape.

But this time, Klea suddenly said something in a soft voice.

"Emery... Please stay... Will you?"

Emery was ninety percent sure Klea was still drunk, therefore he decided to stay quiet. But then, she said something again.

"Please stay... I wish you to stay..." Klea said while her eyes still closed. However, her arms and legs started to get closer and closer until she hugged Emery.

"You're warm, Emery..." Klea muttered.

Their two bodies clung together and Emery felt Klea's smooth body on his own when her arms were hugging around his body. The feeling of her breasts pressed tightly against his arm made Emery weak, unable to move. Some thoughts began to flash in his mind, only to be quickly swatted by him. Emery was quite sure he heard a small chuckle from the girl next to him.

"Emery... Emery..." said Klea softly.

"Yes...?" replied Emery as he turned his head.

When he turned his head, Emery saw that the beautiful girl's face was close, extremely close to him, too close, it was borderline dangerous. The next thing he knew was the pink lips of her were pressing against his.

A feeling, a new sensation sprouted inside him. Emery froze and couldn't say anything as he let the beautiful girl kiss him.

As their lips parted, Emery heard Klea muttering, "Just stay here, Emery... I feel warm with you near..."

Upon hearing that, Emery decided to return Klea's hug. A feeling of comfort bloomed within him. At this moment, the whole feeling of worry and exhaustion he felt was overwhelmed by this comfort as Emery felt very calm. Without realizing it, Emery fell asleep with Klea in his arms.

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When the morning came, Emery woke up feeling very refreshed. For a moment, he forgot he had just spent a night sleeping with Klea. When he turned his head to the side, he saw Klea, who had also just opened her eyes.

The two teenagers paused and looked at each other as if the time had frozen.

"..."

"Kyaaaaa!!!" Klea screamed hysterically as she quickly retreated from Emery.

"E-Emery?! W-Why are you here? Did we...?" Klea said quickly.

Emery panicked at the accusation. He quickly stopped her from thinking too far.

At the same time, Julian, Thrax, and Chumo broke into the bedroom thinking something had happened to Klea when they heard her scream. However, the trio was greeted by the sight of Emery on top of the

bed, with Klea right beside him. In a split second, the atmosphere suddenly turned weird, with all of them turning silent.

"..."

The whole situation made everyone confused, especially Emery. The five people could only stare at each other awkwardly. And then, a woman's voice was suddenly heard from the corner of the room without them realizing it.

"Hope you guys are not busy, because my master would like to see you all."

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Everyone's gaze immediately turned towards the source of the voice. There, in the corner of the room, stood a woman in all-black tight clothes wearing a red mask with white stripes on it. Looking at the woman, everyone knew who she was.

But currently, all of them were in a very awkward situation. The current situation was Emery and Klea on top of the bed, together. Meanwhile, the three boys were staring at them with weird gazes.

Realizing the atmosphere, Emery quickly got up from the bed and said to the woman, "Ahh! It's you! Why do you like to sneak in like this? Can't you just knock on the door?"

When he finished his sentence, Emery realized he said something that could be interpreted wrong. Glancing towards his friends, Emery saw them staring at him, weirdly.

The masked woman, on the other hand, didn't seem to care and just said, "You shouldn't make my master wait any longer. Let us go now."

"Y-Yea...Yeah! Sure!" Turning around and shifting his gaze towards his friends, Emery immediately flashed a smile, awkward one while saying, "Let's go, everyone! Yes...?"

Seeing Emery's attempt to dissolve the situation, all of them could only nod their heads and leave the room, preparing to go. A few minutes later, the four boys were seen waiting outside the residence while Klea was nowhere to be seen. It looked like she still needed some time to prepare herself.

When the four of them were waiting for Klea, Emery felt the gazes from all three of his friends, as they were still staring at him. When he turned around and looked at them, Emery saw something in their eyes, something different. Emery decided to break the silence, when he couldn't stand their glances anymore. "Uhm... Guys? Why are you like this?"

"I can't believe it!" Thrax exclaimed. He approached Emery and embraced his shoulders, "My boy Emery is a man now! HAHAHA!" he laughed loudly. "My man! This is great news!"

Before Emery could say anything, Julian beat him to it. "Yeah, me too! You act faster than I thought!" he said, while his expression still showed a shocked look. "From all the secret spells, the transformation, and then this! Wow... Emery. I really don't know you anymore." Julian said with a smile. Meanwhile, Emery could see Chumo vigorously nodding his head in agreement.

Emery was dumbfounded when he heard his friends' reactions. He then immediately tried to think of a way to clear this misunderstanding. Raising his hands in front of him, Emery said, "I-I.. Guys! There's nothing happening between us. I just slept."

Upon hearing that, their expression immediately showed skepticism, including Chumo.

"Don't deny it, Emery. I don't believe you at all!" Julian said. "There's no way nothing happened when you sleep next to such a gorgeous girl. It's either you are doing it or you didn't sleep. And you are saying that you just 'sleep'? I don't believe it!"

"I-I..." Emery tried to say anything but couldn't. Thankfully, Thrax said something that helped him.

"Actually, Roman. same things happened a lot to me when I was drunk."

Seeing that Thrax was helping him, Emery felt much better as he quickly supported the claim. "Yes! Exactly! We are all drunk! it's not possible"

But, Thrax wasn't done yet. "Even though most of the times I fell asleep, my manhood still did the deed, if you know what I mean.?" Thrax smirk towards Emery

"NO! No!! That's not what happened!" Emery screamed. "Alright, can we stop talking about this and focus on what is in front of us?" Emery said, as he tried to divert the topic. But, Thrax couldn't let him do that easily.

"But... we are just standing here, waiting. So, tell us about what you did last night."

"Nothing! Absolutely nothing!" Emery said. "Can we just not talk about this anymore? Please?"

"Alright..."

However, even though they already decided to not talk about it anymore, Emery could still see Thrax smiling continuously, Julian still puzzled and Chumo still staring at him weirdly. Fortunately, Klea finally came out of the residence and joined the group.

"I'm sorry, guys! I took a longer shower today... After what happened last night." Klea said while her face was blushing.

All eyes immediately returned to Emery, who just stood there speechless, wondering what was wrong with his life. But then, Klea suddenly laughed.

"Hahaha! You're so funny, Emery! And you guys too! So hilarious!" Klea said, receiving the confused gazes from the three boys, "I'm fine guys, really!"

She then looked at Emery and said with a smile, "I don't mind at all."

"!!!"

'But I didn't do anything!' Emery thought in his mind.

When another round of questioning was about to be held, a sudden voice interrupted them, "Ehem!"

They immediately turned around and saw the masked woman.

"So, are you all ready yet?" she asked.

"Yes, yes, we are ready," Emery answered quickly, as if his life was depending on it.

The masked woman immediately walked out of the courtyard, while the group followed behind. They kept walking until they saw a portal and entered it.

Moments later, the group could see a sight in front of them. Seeing the familiar grey bricks that were painted on the walls of most of the buildings here with their scarlet and azure blue rooftops, and combined with the imposing sight of the tall towers, Emery could tell where they were right now. The crowds and the alleys here told them they were currently at the portal just outside the combat institution.

Emery thought the masked woman would lead them to the arena. But this time, they didn't head towards the arena, instead they were guided into a special area with a grand and majestic entrance gate filled with guards clad in golden armor. Just from the distance, Emery could see at the first glance that those armors were extraordinary artifacts.

When the guards saw the approaching masked woman, they immediately ordered the entrance gate to be opened. A while later, a rumbling resounded, as the gate was slowly opened. When they arrived at the gate, it was already fully opened and the group immediately entered it.

When they passed the gate, Emery and his friends were welcomed with a sight of a vast courtyard, lush grasses and abundant trees filled its surroundings. In the middle of the courtyard, one could see five statues of magus, each of them sculpted in different postures.

When Emery observed the statues closely, he could feel the statues were giving a unique ambience to its surroundings. The ambience was so strong it could also be felt by others.

When Thrax noticed the face of the statues, he became energetic. He then explained who those statues were.

"Those 5 statues were modeled after the former combat magus champions, who were currently the 5 guardians of the combat institute. They are all amazing fighters." He then turned his attention to the woman walking in front. "Is your master one of them?" Thrax asked.

Alas, the masked woman chose to ignore him and kept walking forward. She didn't even bother to turn her head around.

After passing through the courtyard, the large path they were on split into five. They proceeded to walk on one of the paths until they finally saw a small palace in the shape of a building that took Klea by surprise. The building architecture looked similar to the ancient buildings that could be found in Egypt.

They arrived at the bottom of the building and saw hundreds of stairs they needed to conquer, in order to reach their destination. After taking a deep breath, the group immediately climbed the staircase. When they reached the end of the stairs, they found a giant gate that was half opened.

When they peeked inside, they saw a magnificent giant hall. Its floor was made of polished sandstone blocks, while one could see towering, glistening pillars supported the ceiling. Inside the cathedral-like

hall, stood a giant podium, where one could see a middle-aged man with a short beard. He was dressed in gleaming gold armor and sat on top of a giant throne.

The man was looking straight at them before they even went into the hall. When they realized the man was gazing at them, they felt the man's gaze emanated a formless aura that suppressed the five of them.

When they finally entered the hall and could clearly see the man, Emery flinched as he recognized the man. This man was one of the men who stared at him in combat stadium last year.

The masked woman, who was in front of them, knelt in front of the throne and said, "Master, I have brought the 5 acolytes as you requested."

"Yes, you may leave now. Yuria."

"Yes, Master."