

Once Human 571

Chapter 571

"Are you done yet?"

A bit annoyed, Arthur asked the calm Celes, who was backing her things very slowly, clearly taking her sweet time . They're probably the only pair who still has not started searching for their target, which kind of frustrated Arthur, who did not want to be disqualified due to this woman's easy-going behavior .

"I told you there's no time limit . As long as we find the Bee, we'll proceed to the next floor so why are you in a rush?"

"Unlike you, I didn't come here to have a picnic but to reach the highest floor . "

"You will reach it... if you behave accordingly and stop the urge of getting everything done within a day . The competition may last months if not years and it's pointless to burnout yourself right at the beginning . "

He didn't how to properly retort so he snorted and kept waiting for Celes, who finished packing two minutes later . After she finished eating, her hair magically changed color, becoming beige, her face also brightened and her expression lightened, no longer grim and expressionless .

Soon, the two embarked on their journey to find this normal-looking Bee, which is quite a small thing to search for in this world . The third floor was called the Land of Ancients and, to sum it up, it's an old-world, desolate and lacking any vibrant life .

The green vegetation was nowhere to be seen and even if you stumble upon a tree, it's a mutated kind that's dangerous and aggressive . The place was a series of half-destroyed mountain ranges, enormous canyons, and ancient ruins inhabited by strange and powerful monsters . It is a deadly place to tread for a God Monarch, though an Overgod can manage if he or she exercise a bit of caution . As for Exalted Gods, they shouldn't encounter any problems, however, that doesn't mean there aren't living beings that can threaten them .

"Any idea what this Bee is?"

Seeing her carefully look at the tattoo on the back of her hand, Arthur asked her, hoping she can facilitate the search .

Unfortunately, Celes shook her head while turning around and walking ahead .

"You know nothing so why are you heading to that direction?"

She halted her steps, slightly turned her head, glancing at him while replying: "It's a hunch . "

"A hunch? Hah!"

Arthur stood his ground, refusing to follow her up just because of a hunch . In terms of locating something, he was much more suited than Celes, who spoke and acted abnormally . Irritated, she glared at him without saying anything, however, he could feel a slight change in the air . Understanding what's going on, he grinned and mockingly said:

"You better try harder, this fog is useless . "

She creased her brows, both startled and confused, unable to understand how he saw the colorless fog or was even able to resist it . In the end, she concluded that he was a Death Magic-user but not an experienced one, which is, sadly and actually, quite the opposite .

"Honestly, since we're a pair now, I don't want to fight you or drag you around like a rag so, I humbly request that you do not resort to any aggressive actions... like the one you just did . You may be one of the Nine Seats but don't forget that I'm one too . "

In the end, Celes let out a sigh and followed Arthur, who, after meticulously stretching his sense and using various detection skills, found an area that is inhabited by various kinds of insects, though he was unable to sense the presence of any Bees . Nevertheless, in this situation, it's the best place to search into, and the probability of finding the Bee is high .

"Wow! I like your hair . "

Maxine leaned closer to the pink-haired woman, admiring her long and bright-colored hair . She was paired with this strange, whom she was unfamiliar with but knew was decently strong . Her ability to judge people with one look is one of her talents and the moment her eyes landed on Lucy, the player was sure that her temporary partner is a strong and capable individual .

"Thanks! Yours isn't bad either . "

Contrary to her usual attitude, Lucy took a more friendly approach as to not alert Arthur or anyone familiar with the way she behaves . She smiled back at the talkative Maxine, who didn't seem to be worried about the target and was more focused on getting to know Lucy .

"Where are you from?"

"Bard Realm in the Cloud Sea Universe . "

"Are you part of any sect?"

"No, I prefer not to be restrained by sect or clan rules . "

"So you're a cultivator? How come you've got the System . "

"I once visited the System Universe so it was automatically added to me . "

What Lucy said was believable because it was the truth . If anyone goes to the System Universe, they'll get the System . Of course, it's possible to remove it using powerful cultivation techniques or unique artifacts, which is why no one was worried about having it permanently .

"The system is useful, right? It tells you exactly how strong you are . "

Lucy seemed rather doubtful as she sighed and complained: "It's helpful but I've heard bad rumors about it . Like secretly planted malwares that hinder the future progress of the users or programs that spy on special people . "

As she heard that, Maxine chuckled but didn't deny any of those claims . She sized up this pink-haired woman before speaking again:

"I see you've gathered quite a bit of info . "

"No no, it's nothing like that . Those are just stuff I've heard in my travels . "

After a short silence in which neither of did anything in particular, Max said:

"Well, it matters not now . Let us find this Bee or whatever . "

Zodiak and Hach'ara traveled a long way until they found the remnants of a city . There was rubble everywhere and the buildings were way too over-sized for humans to live in . This can only mean that the previous inhabitants of this world had a ginormous size, at least tens of meters in height .

The disgusting old man kept pestering Zodiak and talking every five minutes, though his words and questions received no reply from the ever-so-silent Dark Magic user .

"Anyway... what do you think this black circle means?"

Surprisingly, Zodiak did reply this time . He lifted his head and pointed his index at the sky, more precisely at the jet black moon which was visible in broad daylight .

"What?! We need to get the moon?"

Hach'ara didn't quite believe Zodiak as it's impossible to fly, much less fly all the way to the moon . While it's true that it resembles the tattoo on their hands, it's not yet confirmed that the literal moon of the third floor is what they need to acquire, nonetheless, that possibility can't be ruled out, which made the insect master a bit angry .

"There are cases when somethings are not actually what they seem . There is no such thing as Black Moon, I think it's an illusion... a mirage of some sort . "

"So we need to find the cause of this . . mirage?"

Zodiak inspected the mountain-like buildings and towering doors, his mind thinking about a certain extinct race .

He motioned for his partner to go the side before crouched down and stabbed his hand into the ground, immediately corrupting it and turning it jet black . The area of effect of Dark Magic became larger until there was a dark circle with a radius of 50m around Zodiak .

Before Hach'ara could react, he and Zodiak were sucked into the ground, appearing in a luminous city filled with machines, some pumping energy and others doing various miscellaneous jobs . The place was so very bright, almost blinding, it was truly a breath-taking and shocking sight .

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The room, or rather, the laboratory, was dusty and had the smell of something that was recently burnt . A bunch of books and papers were laying around every corner, exotic goods and strange antics stored in

wooden boxes, and the most eye-catching of everything were the scientific machines that were used in various experiments .

'Tis a secluded and secretive place that belongs to a very old being, a self-proclaimed scientist who passes all of his time in this laboratory, his only goal is to uncover the unknown . His thirst for knowledge was never sated, fueling his ever-so-rising ambition .

Lucy was guided here by Forne, who left shortly after, leaving her alone with a strange-looking entity . He had a humanoid figure but was actually a rock, a literal boulder that managed to reach this state through luck and constant hard-work .

He was the oldest member of Black Rose and one of its founders, the Yellow Seat of Science,... .

"You must be the newest member of our organization, Lucy MoonStar . "

Contrary to the stereotypical scientist, his lab coat was the color of mud, he was a bit short with messy orange hair, golden eyes and a body covered in stones .

Unlike the other seats, Lucy didn't feel pressure from this man, who appeared to be easy-going and didn't behave with arrogance or dominance .

"Nice to meet you . "

Lucy didn't act coldly and properly greeted him though she didn't get too close to him as he appeared to be in some kind of experiment that was affecting his surroundings, polluting the air and disturbing the Nether Energy .

"I'll finish in a sec, please wait . "

She stood at the entrance, watching him as he was in the middle of poking a black cube with two very thin, almost invisible, needles . A few minutes later, the cube was successfully opened but by doing this, the scientist seemed visibly tired . He let out a long sigh as he sat on one of the chairs and actually took out a banana from under his sleeve . He slowly peeled it while gazing back at Lucy .

"I've heard the main parts of your plan from Forne . Attacking the Nameless Knight? It is truly a reckless endeavor... one where the consequences are much more disastrous than you lot can imagine, but I digress . After all, I've nothing to do with that . "

"We are not attacking the Nameless Knight but Sol'Khin . "

Lucy tried to correct him but the boulder man chuckled and retorted: "Is there a difference? Sol'khin is inside him so the moment he senses danger, he'll surface . Even if all the Nine Seats team-up, I doubt you'll take him down if he were to control that boy . "

"We'll be catching him unguarded . "

"Unguarded? Miss, no, Madam Lucy, I don't think you understand the absurdity of your words . Do you think he's called the strongest living being in all three Universes just because he defeated a few baddies? Or through a fluke? I'll warn you again, he's not someone you should mess with . I don't know him very well but I am certain that he's aware of his situation and since he couldn't fix it himself, I don't think your attempt will . Sure enough, the Orb of the Fallen Overgods can extract Sol'Khin but do you think

he'll watch you do that to him? No, he'll try to escape or kill all of you . Sol'Khin is a deceitful being who inherited his father's slyness, a signal from him and you've got an army of Cthulhu in your hands . Look, I know he's- *sigh*, never mind, I've said enough . "

He beckoned for her to come closer, which she silently and obediently did . Her mind was thinking about Arthur and how to handle him inside the Red Tower . The soul bound no longer exists so, as long as she doesn't attract too much attention, he shouldn't be able to recognize her .

The scientist took a pair of glasses and leaned his head closer to take a good look at Lucy .

"A half-white specter, half-demon . Mana user and a Yin Physique . Magma, Darkness and fire Attributes? I can sense the Golden Crow fire . Ohh... what's this?"

He fixated his kind-of falling glasses and frowned as he focused on her right arm .

"Interesting, very interesting . I see that you've met the Black Devil . "

Honestly, Lucy was surprised to see him deduce so much with just one look . It reminded her of an ability Arthur spoke . Apparently, with the use of a specific card, the Joker can also see everything about a target . Whether it's their stats, hidden powers, physiques, etc...

"Compared to the rest of the Twelve, which most are hot-blooded, Timos is a cool and reasonable guy . However, he doesn't go around giving Devil arms to anyone... which means you did something to him . You and your husband were banished to Riarravar but managed to return . "

With a hand on his rocky chin, he pondered for ten seconds or so before laughing:

"So the first world is no more? I guess it's about time for me to travel too... mayhap I'll meet Timos again . "

Without needing her to say anything, he figured everything out and came out with the right conclusion .

"By the way, I heard that your mother is the Matriarch of the White Specter Clan . Your father is Thordan from that alchemy sect... have you ever wondered why you're half-demon? Your father was human yet you don't have a drop of human blood inside of you . A peculiar matter, right? Honestly, it picked my curiosity . "

Seeing her slightly frown, the scientist smirked and added: "Your mother, Katrina, only had one man in her life so your father cannot be some mysterious demon hiding in someplace . "

"Forne said that you have something that can help me hide my identity?"

Lucy quickly switched the topic, unwilling to discuss this matter with a stranger . The scientist didn't seem to mind as he shrugged his shoulders and retrieved a mask from his storage .

He presented it to Lucy while explaining something:

"This darling is one of my finest works . With the exception of one person and one thing, it can fool everyone . It can alter the System so that when Appraisal is used on you, fake info will appear . However, you must know that it must always be active, meaning that using your Time ability, which can freeze time, will stop its effect for a short period of time, so refrain from doing that . "

"What or who are the exceptions you spoke of?"

"Ah... you don't have to worry about them . One is the Red Tower, which won't act against you, and the other is one of the Twelve . "

The boy did as told, he carried the coffin to the continent in East, which was inhabited mostly by humans . Fortunately, there weren't a lot of dangerous beasts in the forest, and that made the job easier . He already got the promised gold and all that's left is to complete the task .

He dragged the big coffin to peaceful and lush forest, found the cave after a while and started digging . First, he dug a long corridor then built a shabby door and painted a symbol on it . Lastly, he built a miniature room and placed everything like the note handed by the Empress said .

The coffin in the center, two chests in the corner and a simple table and chair . He ascertained that everything was in order before leaving this place and forcing himself to forget about all that he did and happened, like the oath he made stated .

Jackob didn't know that by building Zodiac's fake tomb in the Human continent of Astria, he started a long chain of events .

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"Arthur, this is the only thing I can do for you . Please understand . "

An old man stood in the room built by Jackob . He looked at his skeleton laying inside the coffin, his face filled with melancholy, he stretched his and caressed the bones . After a while, he retracted his gaze and removed his robe, along with a few other items . He put them neatly next to the corpse before taking out the final thing, a cane with a creepy skeletal head on its top .

This was Sol'Khin's cane that Arthur found when he stumbled upon this tomb .

"There will come a day where I'll take this back . "

Later, Zodiac left the cave and flew to the sky, stopping only when he reached a self-made boundary . He withdrew a large golden scroll from his ring and poured almost all of his energy inside it, causing his skin to start withering and blood to come out of his nose and lips .

"Twist Time and bend to my will! I wish for thee to take the titan to the past... ten thousand years from now!"

A minute later, the continent below Zodiac, along with three others disappeared from the Water Region . Actually, they weren't continents but islands that were in the edge of the region, isolated from the world and rarely frequented by powerhouses, so when they vanished, no one really noticed .

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After traveling in the plain lands for approximately an hour, Celes and Arthur reached the insect-infested area . There was a large swamp that was situated at the center of the area, it looked disgusting and the smell was nauseating, to say the least . In addition to the countless types of insects found here, there

were also all kinds of poisonous plants and water-creature that were able to adapt to his harsh environment .

"Are you sure the Bee is here?"

Celes looked disgusted, frowning and waving her hand around, trying to get rid of the flies clustering around her . She looked uncomfortable and unwilling to spend an extra second in this place . Unfortunately, Arthur replied with words she most likely didn't want to hear .

"I never said I'm sure but considering how many insects there are here, the Bee should be hiding somewhere in the swamp or in its vicinities . "

Currently, the two were inside an unusual small forest around the swamp, their footsteps were light as to not alert any enemies . While it is true that they were both very strong, Arthur didn't dare behave recklessly as he was able to sense several monsters that are able to equally fight Overgods .

Thanks to his detections skills, he's able to locate the threats and make a detour . After all, fighting would only alert other monsters and, possibly, contestants too .

Up until now, Arthur didn't see or sense any pairs that have entered the swamp beside them, which made him a tad relieved .

As the two were silently walking, a small tree, which reached their waist, suddenly moved, latching itself onto Celes' ankle, its branches becoming poisonous thorns . Before this half-sentient plant could do anything, it disintegrated into dust . The moment it made contact with the woman's skin, its body ceased to exist due to the latter's Death Physique, which is able to turn anything she touches into nothingness .

Actually, it accelerates one's growth and makes it die much faster than it should . Such plants do not live for a long time so Celes didn't do anything as the Physique automatically took care of the attacker . If it was human, he wouldn't die so fast unless he's much weaker than the Grey Seat .

Arthur witnessed everything but didn't comment, choosing to continue walking without minding his silent and grumpy companion .

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Ten minutes later, Arthur abruptly halted his steps, motioned for Celes to remain silent as his body vanished, transforming into a large praying mantis with two long scythe-like limbs and two transparent wings . Before the Grey seat could say anything, the mantis disappeared, leaving afterimages as it traversed the forest with incredible speed . The place was a bit narrow for Arthur but he managed to easily zigzag between the trees until he reached the Southern part of the swamp .

Unlike what they do invaders, the weaker insects and plants didn't try to attack Arthur and, instead, backed away, leaving him standing alone on the edge of swamp, which had dirty green water and felt ominous . Without even needing to look, Arthur felt the presence of at least two strong monsters deep into the swamp . One seemed to be gauging him while the other was uninterested, simply laying on the floor of the swamp, these two, at least, had the power-level of a peak Overgod, if not more .

Such monsters can easily fight against Exalted Gods and leave unscathed if they ever wanted to . Fortunately, none of the two was a Bee so Arthur doesn't have to provoke them, furthermore, the more problematic matter is the arrival of another pair .

If it were two people that Arthur deemed as non-dangerous, he wouldn't have acted like this, however, one of the incomers was Maxine . She the boss of the mage and thief who attacked him on the 2nd floor and the Appraisal results from last time told him more than enough about her .

She was one of the strongest contestants and seemed to be mentally unstable . She kind of reminded him of his brother, Wolfram, and that is very good news . She was a battle-freak and won't stay still if he and Celes were to meet with her .

As for the woman accompanying her, the pink-haired one, she was totally unfamiliar to Arthur . Maxine and her companion were standing on the other side of the swamp, three to four hundred meters away . They seemed to be preoccupied with something . Plus, the monster who was gauging his strength seconds earlier has shifted his attention to the two women . It slowly crept towards them, its body magically slithering in the water, smooth and almost unnoticeable, it seemed about to merge with the transparent water, becoming one with it .

'It'll make them busy for some time but I shouldn't get my hopes up . '

Maxine and the woman beside her didn't seem weak and even if the monster were to initiate a fight, they would be able to deal with it sooner or later .

"Hey, the Bee is not here so let's go . "

Celes followed Arthur and shrouded himself in Death Energy while talking to the praying mantis from a distance .

"Wa-"

Arthur was about to reply only for his insect-eyes to meet with the pink-haired woman, who, unlike air-headed Maxine, was sharp and very aware of her surroundings . The distance between them wasn't that big, however, the sheer number of insects and monsters in-between made it quite difficult for anyone to notice him, in addition, he was using skills that lowered his presence .

Like a shooting star, Lucy kicked the ground, launching herself toward the praying mantis though he target wasn't the insect but something close it .

Sadly, before she could even cross half the distance, the swamp water rose into the air and an enormous monster revealed itself . It actually resembled a very ugly and grotesque merman . Its upper body was humanoid with long dark green hair and light green skin, its eyes were jet black, as for its lower body, it was like a fish... or a mermaid, albeit more unsightly .

It used its kind of slimy body to block the incoming Lucy, who punched a hole through the merman's abdomen . Her fist enveloped by Lava, melting the tough skin and reaching deep into the organs . The monster screeched loudly and retaliated by lashing out with tail, its speed faster than Lucy's reaction . She was flung in the air but wasn't seriously injured and just when the merman was about to follow-up, another monstrous force attacked it, cutting parts of its scale-riddle tail and pushing back into the water .

Maxine smirked as she drank a green potion before falling in the water, surprisingly not drowning and actually walking on it as if it's solid . As for Lucy, she managed to stabilize her body and retrieve the flying feather, using it to move freely .

Arthur didn't have the time to watch the fight as was shocked to see a seemingly normal Bee appear out of nowhere . The moment the pink-haired woman noticed him, the insect appeared from the emptiness and started buzzing around him . He remained motionless and patiently waited for it to get within his range .

Of course, he could still jump and catch it but the task was definitely not as easy as it seemed . The Bee looked normal but he couldn't appraise it and it didn't seem afraid of him at all as it flew from one flower to another .

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Arthur used his invisible thread in an attempt to catch the Bee, however, the moment they got too close, the insect started buzzing loudly and literally vanished . Fortunately, Arthur's Sixth Sense was locked on to it so he was able to know what happened . The praying mantis turned blurred as it left afterimages, confusing Celes, who only saw the Bee disappear . She thought it just vanished but the reality was that this normal-looking and harmless target had a speed that even made Arthur flabbergasted .

His scythe-like limbs cut everything in his way, whether it's trees, thick grass or hiding monsters . The Bee was intelligent enough to traverse a path full of obstacles to hinder the incoming parasite . The problem is; Arthur cannot kill it, he has to capture it alive so that the mission is completed . It definitely looked exactly like the tattoo and its fast and absurd response to danger ascertained his suspicions, the only thing left is to not let it escape his sight and, of course, catch it .

HE could only continue chasing, he didn't use [Faster Than Death] because there's a probability it'll suddenly shift direction, moreover, this kind of teleportation isn't that efficient in this cat and mouse chase . Celes, who was left alone near the swamp, let out a sigh as she looked at the direction Arthur darted to, not knowing whether it's wise to follow or not . She was strong but that doesn't mean she's as fast as them, which made her practically useless in this problematic situation . There was even the matter of Maxine and Lucy, who seemed interested in the Bee .

Speaking of them, the high-leveled player managed to cut down the Merman, killing it in less than a minute . She and Lucy swiftly crossed the Swamp and wanted to get the Bee but they were blocked by the Grey Seat of Decay .

"You stop her, I'll go after the Bee ."

The pink-haired woman darted toward the forest while leaving Max alone with Celes .

"Yes yes, you do that . Fighting her seems more fun ."

With her a sword in hand and ready to attack, the player sized up her opponent, her spirit ignited and her eyes restlessly examining every inch of Death Magic user .

As for Lucy, she was like a bullet, running through everything and leaving her path filled with Lava that melted the vegetation and even caused a small fire, which will most likely spread due to the poisonous gas lingering around the swamp .

Arthur ran after the Bee for three minutes, the two even left the whole Swamp area and entered an open area filled with small mountains made from countless small white stones . In the midst of this chase, he changed forms, becoming a large White Tiger enveloped by green lightning and black flames . Two wings massive wings could be seen erected from its back, one was vibrant and majestic like that of an angel while the other was inky black, bony, and grotesque .

In addition, he used [Griffin's Bloody Switch], converting all of his Wisdom to Agility, making him attain a speed that would any spectator dumbstruck .

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\ "This should be the area . \ "

A middle-aged man with long black hair, a fully-grown beard, and simple dark blue leather clothes just entered the rocky area along with his partner, a young man wearing a mage's robe and holding a magical wand .

The first one was an exceptional and famous individual often called Sword God . He had a very high status across all the three Universes thanks to his domineering and invincible sword skills . A long time ago, he even battled the Nameless Knight and, from what the rumors claim, it's the only loss he suffered in his entire life .

Sword God Ber Von Xin, he's someone who reached the peak of sword mastery and is the strongest participant of the Red Tower . He got paired with the mage that came with Maxine, the quiet yet strong Tula . He was the second in command of Maxine's group and a talented Magician who excels especially in Ice and Water magic .

Ber Von Xin chose to enter the Red Tower to fight either Leiu or the Joker . However, when he saw Arthur and how he cut down the Celestial Tribulation, another goal was added to his list . He could never forget the sight of that simple yet devastating sword slash . From anyone's point of view, it seemed slow and clumsy but perfection has always been in simplicity, moreso for a sword user .

This pair needs to obtain a special white rock that has a star symbol engraved on it, which is why they immediately came here . Tula didn't object any of his companion's decision and obediently followed, knowing that it's wise to listen to the expert rather than try to find the rock using his magic, which isn't really suited for 'treasure-hunting' .

The two didn't waste time and started meticulously going through every rock, neither complaining or slacking off . Approximately ten minutes after they began, they heard an awfully loud explosion occur a short distance away .

One of the small mountains blew up and a massive Divine Beast showed itself . Its appearance was unique and rather frightening, an ominous aura enveloping it as sped toward one direction . Tula remained expressionless but his wandering eyes indicated that he was shocked and wasn't able to

follow Arthur . However, Ber Von Xin could see the shadow of the White Tiger chasing after a minuscule insect .

Without needing any confirmation, they knew it was the parasite who caused the Celestial Tribulation . The mage had already confronted him on the second floor but the Sword God never faced him, neither was he going to anytime soon .

It wasn't a good time and place to initiate a battle so the middle-aged man remained still and merely watched everything unfold .

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Arthur was only a few meters behind the Bee despite using multiple skills to drastically boost his Agility . The Bee was able to shift direction without losing any momentum but that wasn't the case for him, moreover, every time he tried freezing time to slow it down, it'll just break free easily and increase its speed .

He just crashed into another mountain of stone, which the Bee managed to pass through using tiny holes . Sadly, Arthur wasn't able to destroy the mountain as it was actually a sleeping, humongous golem . As countless rubble flew into the air, Arthur activated the White Tiger's special ability, allowing him to pass through physical objects .

Unfortunately, he was able to travel a short distance before the golem managed to somehow grab his body and slam it in the other direction, clearly doing it to buy time for the fleeing Bee . By the time Arthur stabilized his body, the insect was no longer in sight, it actually managed to successfully escape .

Feeling irritated over this, Arthur unleashed his anger upon this moving boulder . His appearance changed again, becoming an enormous Azure Dragon that unleashed a deafening cry .

Before the golem could do anything else, the dragon opened its mouth, in which a violent and transparent red energy was quickly forming . The moving rock seemed a bit sentient as it crossed its arms to block the dragon's breath .

Less than five seconds later, an unstoppable blast was shot from Arthur's mouth, flinging the enormous body of the golem in the air . When it heavily crashed into the ground, the earth restlessly shook and mountains of stones crumbled . Though more than half of its body vanished due to the dragon's breath, the golem used the favorable terrain to restore its body .

Arthur transformed into the Vermillion Bird and flapped his wings, filling the ground and sky with bright orange flames that incinerated everything in their way . A blinding orange sun rose from the bird's chest and shone in the sky, covering the real sun's light and bringing a suffocating heat .

By the time the golem stood up, the miniature sun of fire exploded, resulting in a truly frightening shock wave .

Tula protected himself with several layers of ice barrier which quickly melted, causing him to be pushed a few hundred meters . As for the Sword God, he remained motionless like a statue, neither affected by the heat of the flames surrounding him . He seemed to be admiring the sight, his body covered by a thick layer of sword essence, protecting him from all damage .

When the area cleared a bit, this rocky area was gone, it was replaced by a blackened ground . However, right where the golem miserably perished, there was a shiny white rock that stood out .

Arthur paid no attention to the rock as he turned his head to the side, his eyes focusing on a pink-haired woman which stood at the edge of the damaged area . He returned to his human appearance and deactivated the skills, seeing no more purpose in chasing a lost target .

Just as he was about to leave, he noticed a black-haired man walk toward the golem's non-existent corpse and pick up the shiny rock . When he touched it, the tattoo on the back of his hand reacted and soon, he surrounded by a pulsating blue light .

Knowing that the task was completed, Ber Von Xin smiled at Arthur, showing no hostility whatsoever . He politely bowed to the parasite before he, and the faraway Tula, were teleported to the 4th floor .

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Lucy wasn't able to immediately catch up to Arthur as she didn't have high stats like before . When the soul bound was gone, the stats bonus she gained from Arthur no longer took effect either . Nevertheless, she was still an Overgod with a strong Physique, she also has her Devil Arm . Thanks to the past Soul Bond, her limiter was automatically broken so her stats didn't go under the 1 billion mark .

They weren't as high as before but she kind of compensated that with her cultivation and over-the-top techniques . The only down-side is a massive down-grade to her physical abilities .

Seeing that Arthur had lost the Bee, she didn't chase after him anymore and was about to go back only for a fast silhouette to head her way .

Her fists were enveloped by hot Lava as Arthur rushed toward her, his hand releasing colorless and unseen energy that shook the space and restricted the range of her Magma attribute .

Seeing his frontal attack, she thought he was going to attack so she punched him . Her retaliation had missed as he vanished, appearing behind her, though before he could do anything, the ground underneath his feet became liquid Lava, boiling hot and melting his boots .

Like a fountain, the Lava exploded, forcing him to retreat only for Lucy to swiftly turn around and violently kick the right side of his waist . Having a good grasp of what he could and couldn't do, Lucy was surprised that her attack managed to hit .

Her feet, which became actual magma, hit his body and melted the clothes, skin and even the bones, causing a lot of blood to gush out . Arthur showed no reaction to his injury, his eyes focusing on her now-retracing leg and incoming fist .

Seeing her fist going for his chest, he grasped it and dispelled the skill, finally getting rid of the magma . He used his leg to attack the leg which was keeping her standing, quickly making her fall . He followed up by applying more force and pushing her to the ground and pinning both of her hands .

"What are you doing?"-Lucy

His eyes were glued to hers as he totally immobilized her .

"No, Lucy, what are YOU doing?"

He spoke with a calm and a certain tone as if he knew he got the right person . Appraisal gave him information about this pink-haired woman, moreover, with his eyes, he should be able to see the real appearance of any target yet all he saw was an unfamiliar face, nevertheless, he sure of his guess, of his intuition . After all, it just didn't make sense that he hasn't met her yet .

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Seeing no reaction from her, Arthur let out a chuckle but his stoned expression didn't change . He released her hands, slowly get up while saying:

"I know you, Lucy... you would not try to trick me over something simple . "

His eyes never left hers, his attention wholly focused on her . Her expression was neither cold nor angry, she just looked back without saying anything .

"From your walk to your voice, I can recognize anything with a glance . Did you really think whatever you used will fool me? Why? Didn't we promise to go through everything together?"

He took a step closer to her, his head inches away from hers .

"Thinking about it, there are not many things that will push you to do something extreme . It's either related to you, Saly... or me? Tell me, Lucy . "

She remained unfazed as she retreated and spoke with angry tone:

"I don't know what you're talking about . You must be mistaking me for someone else . "

She turned around and was about to leave only for Arthur to say

"Fine... let's see how long you can keep that act . "

Her steps momentarily halted, her head slightly turned, glancing at him . He wasn't about to forcefully stop her and, instead, took out the sword given to him by Timos .

The thing Lucy hates seeing the most is Arthur getting hurt hence her overprotecting behavior and over-the-top jealousy .

"You know what this is, right? Our dear 'friend' gifted me this . You were there so you know what it is capable of . "

Without hesitation, he held it with both of his hands and pointed the tip toward his chest . The woman's expression, she tried to act quickly but Arthur acted without any hesitation, stabbing his chest with the normal-looking sword .

Even though he has an incredible defense, the blade easily cut through everything and even damaged his insides, instantly disturbing the flow of Energy inside his body . A lot of blood gushed out of his chest as he fell onto his knees, all bloodied and choking on the scarlet and bitter liquid .

Lucy, who didn't think he'll do such a suicidal thing, panicked as her face turned as pale as a sheet of paper . She dashed toward him and held his body, which couldn't handle the injury and fell on the ground .

Thanks to the pain immunity, there was no agony, however, the self-inflicted injury was truly fatal .

\ "W-what are you doing?!\"

She pressed her hands on the bloody wound while looking at him, demanding an explanation . For a moment, he was unable to reply but he felt, inwardly, he felt relieved when he saw her reaction . He was sure that she was Lucy and this suicidal move brought everything to light .

His shaky hand slowly rose in the air and grasped hers, his face containing a serene smile . Not long after that, he fell unconscious but right when that happened, orange flames rose from his the injury and enveloped him, healing the injury within seconds and getting rid of the sword, which was still stuck there .

The Vermillion Bird's rare healing skill was activated by Arthur right before his consciousness was lost . Although he was back to his normal state not even five minutes later, Arthur didn't wake up, which made Lucy restless . She forgot about the plan and ignored everything around her, her eyes never leaving her husband .

When she noticed that he seemed to be sleeping while tightly clutching her hand, she calmed down and moved to a safer and more isolated location... of course, while bringing him with her .

..

When Arthur woke up, he felt something soft under his head, which he soon discovered that it's Lucy's lap . He turned his head and saw a silver-haired woman look back at him, her face slightly flushed and her eyes wet and a bit swollen, probably due to crying for a long time .

\ "See, I was right .\"

As she saw him smile cheekily, she retracted her feet, causing his head to fall on the ground . She stood up, patted her the dust off her clothes and seemed about to leave .

Arthur also got up and spoke again:

\ "Are perhaps mad? Really? In this situation, I should be the one wh-\"

Before he got to finish his sentence, he was harshly slapped by an angry-looking Lucy .

\ "Why did you do that!\"

He saw her half-furious half-sad expression, something that is very rare to see . This time, he chose to maintain silence, neither apologizing nor demanding an explanation for her actions .

Lucy looked at him, her eyes soon welling up with tears and her berating voice choking up . As he saw her in this state, Arthur was reminded of the past, his expression turning into that of guilt . He walked up to her and wrapped his arms around her trembling shoulders, hugging her tightly in a way that she can't escape his grasp .

\ "Come now, why are you crying? I'm not dead right? I'm in a perfect shape...\"

While their two partners were looking for them, Arthur and Lucy remained in that secluded location . The two sat next to each other and talked, like they always did .

Seeing no purpose in hiding the truth after being discovered, Lucy recounted what happened to her after she left Riarravar . How she got recruited to Black Rose and the real reason behind her disguise, which turned out to be not-so-successful, after all .

\ "So Sol'Khin is hiding inside my brother and they want to force him out using the orb then kill him?\"

\ "Yes, one he's out, he'll control Leiu's body so they needed a lot of experienced fighters . \"

\ "And how many people are there, besides you . \"

\ "The Black Seat, the Grey Seat, G'am Tir, 'X', and the Void Behemoth . They are the ones I know but there could be more . I seem to have met one of the hidden ones but I can't seem to remember...\"

Lucy held her head and tried her best but she couldn't remember the person whom she encountered on the 2nd floor .

\ "What about the Joker? Did he agree to help?\"

\ "From what Forne said, he only agreed to let them try . He said that he won't act against his brother no matter what . \"

Lucy looked at Arthur's serious expression, wondering what he's thinking . After a brief silence, she asked:

\ "... what will you do?\"

Arthur chuckled, lifted his head and stared at the clear blue sky while speaking:

\ "You know, we three once brawled to determine who should be the older brother . It's kind of a stupid way as we didn't use our real powers but it was fair and we swore to respect the results, no matter what they were . I came last and Wolfram was second... Leiu beat us black and blue and ever since that day, we showed him the respect he deserved . Since Wolfram decided not to do anything then, as the youngest brother, should do the same . \"

Chapter 576

\ "That's a relief . I, too, am not going to participate in their battle, my role was only to stop you . \"

As he listened to her, Arthur looked straight into her eyes and asked:

\ "Why did you accept his offer in the first place?\"

\ "If I hadn't, you would have defended your brother and that would've made things easier for Sol'Khin . Forne said that the enemy can travel from one host to another so it's not impossible for him to control you . All I wanted is to keep you away from this big mess . \"

The thief who was part of Maxine's group was currently shaking from head to toe, obviously from fear . When he appeared on the third floor, the first thing he saw was a beast at least five times his size, its

skin was purple and its appearance was the definition of fear . Fortunately, it didn't attack him, however, he soon discovered that it was actually his partner .

For an experienced player such as him, he recognized this monster, which purposely made itself smaller as its real size was burdensome in the Red Tower . As luck would have it, Patio, the thief, had the Void Behemoth as his temporary companion .

Communication was impossible... heck! The thought of leading the way never crossed his mind . He became a mute as he obediently walked behind the large beast, afraid to anger it in any way . The tattoo on the back of his hand depicted a purple hexagon-like object . It was the first time Patio saw such an object so he didn't know where to search, which frustrated the dread-stricken man even more .

At that time, the thief didn't know that what he'll witness on the 3rd floor will almost make him piss his pants . His adventure with the Void Behemoth was neither brief nor absurdly long as, in just two hours, they arrived at a large area filled with all kinds of ruins .

Guided by the Behemoth, they marched toward the biggest ruin and when they tried entering it, the large, motionless statue at the entrance reacted . It stood up from its kneeling position, its two emotionless eyes locking onto the two invaders .

"H-hey... why don't we-"

Patio couldn't even finish as the Void Behemoth loudly roared and leapt at the statue, pushing it on the ground and spitting Void blasts from its mouth, turning the enemy into nothingness . The blasts were made from Void Magic, which devoured everything in its way, whether it's solid, liquid, or gas .

Just like that, in a matter of seconds, the strong guardian protecting the main ruin was defeated, allowing the two to roam the place without any hindrance . The thief didn't know much about this place and felt rather insecure so he maintained a safe distance from the Behemoth while still following him, hoping for some sort of protection, after all, if something happens to him, his partner should be disqualified too .

A few minutes later, a golden light sprung from the ground and enveloped both the beast and the man, taking them to an underground city, where they came face to face with two other contestants .

This city, which was luminous and very majestic, was a nest for countless types of machines . Some meant to do labor work and others to protect the safety of this eternal settlement .

In more than a way, this underground hidden city resembled the place Zodiak visited to retrieve Anduril, which was created by the same race that invented everything here .

Hach'ara was busy dealing with the hundreds of buzzing and flying machines trying to capture both him and his partner so when the Void Behemoth appeared along with the thief, he didn't show any reaction . He had heard of the ancient beast living the Underworld but never personally saw him so he didn't recognize it .

Zodiak, however, was totally the opposite . The aura of Void oozing off the behemoth was enough of a sign to know the beast, even if its appearance was slightly different . He paid no heed to the unremarkable thief and, instead, glared at the growling beast .

\ "What? Do you want to fight here too?\ "

The hostility emanating from the behemoth could not be faked, nevertheless, apart from its deep growling, it didn't anything reckless . After a few moments of intense glaring, it turned his head, focusing its attention on an open area a few hundred meters north of its location .

It was an enormous circular fountain with a shiny, transparent water and jet black floor . At its top, there was a purple gem that was very similar to the hexagon from earlier, however, the problem was the tight security around the fountain .

There were countless golden pipes pumping water from the eternal fountain to the rest of the city... as if it was a power supply . What made it rather confusing was why would a power-supply be in the open and, a fountain, at that .

\ "Fucking hell...\ "

The thief cursed with a low voice as he saw titan-like robots rising from their slumber and circled around the four of them . In addition, the number of minuscule yet fast flying machines reached the thousands and despite Hach'ara destructive retaliation, the numbers weren't dwindling .

\ "Damn! I really couldn't recognize her... it must be something the rock scientist... or whatever he is, invented . \ "

Fortunately, Saly was asleep when Arthur self-injured himself . Though, Wolfram and Leiu witnessed the whole event, from start to finish . They were spectators but apart from seeing, they can't really do anything else... even the sound was cut off .

\ "Sister-in-law is really something, don't you think?\ "

He jokingly said while sneakily glancing at the stone-faced and silent Youth calmly sitting next to him .

\ "Why do you think she did that?\ "

In response, Leiu snorted and retorted:

\ "You already know why, stop with the oblivious act . \ "

\ "Ehh, come on, at least pretend not to notice . \ "

The two brothers were aware of Forne's plan but neither of them commented . The Joker already stated his non-interference, as for Leiu, he maintained his silence, as usual .

\ "Arthur and Lucy won't participate, isn't that a good thing?\ "

The Joker chuckled while saying that but, out of the blue, he felt a hand tightly holding his collar .

\ "I've already warned you, Wolfram . If something happens, you must act!\ "

The youth's hand was slightly shaking and his expression was different from the usual, his eyes were wavering and his breathing was unsteady .

In response to this, the Joker's smile vanished and his face became filled with a gaunt of expressionlessness . He pushed his brother's hand away, fixed his clothes and said:

"Act? How will I act? You want me to kill you? Really? The mighty Nameless Knight is giving up like this..."

"You know very well what will happen if Sol'khin gets out . "

"Yes, I do know . He'll kill everyone present but I don't care . I will protect Arthur and his family... the rest, I don't care . What is this look you're giving me? You think I haven't killed any innocents before?

I spit on the thing they call 'humanity' . All I care about are those close to me so even if the worst happens, I and Arthur will make sure to free you . The whole world can be your enemy but we cannot!"

After saying his piece, Wolfram clicked his tongue and left the room, not forgetting to violently slam the door .

"I want every inch of their bodies chained! DO YOU HEAR ME?!"

The warden of the prison yelled at the low-ranking angels, his temper rising every time he thought about the casualties they suffered to capture the two monsters kneeling before him . Their bodies were heavily injured and riddled with holes that were used for magical chains to pass through and bind their movements and dangerous abilities .

"S-sir Habs, which floor should they be locked into?"

"What do you mean what floor?! The deepest one! Hurry up!"

Habs managed to reach such a high position despite not being angel due to this strength and past military merits . He fought the demons for two hundred years and killed more than fifty thousands by himself, earning him the position of the warden of the Last Moment Prison .

It was quite a cheesy name for an infamous prison but it was named so because everyone who's locked here will live their past moment in their cell . Throughout history, only three people managed to successfully escape, two of them are Forne and Zodiak, who achieved such a feat only because they were imprisoned on the 4th floor .

As per their boss' order, the two newly-captured prisoners were dragged to the deepest floor . Each one was held by four angels and chained from head to toe, they could barely breath properly, much less lift a finger .

Two had identical appearances except for their hair colors, one was snow-white while the other was scarlet red .

They were Midolf and Radolf, who were hunted down by the angels ever since they escaped the war versus the specters . Someone must have snitched to their angels, causing them to relentlessly chase them to the ends of the world .

Unfortunately, after a long and bitter struggle, they were surrounded by three commander angels and captured, at last . Now, they were imprisoned in the Last Moment Prison, more precisely at the deepest floor, where only the most dangerous and powerful criminals are held .

The place was illuminated by white light sparks which couldn't illuminate the whole floor, which, by the way, was much smaller than the rest but guarded by at least five hundred fighter angels .

"Hahahaha I'm finally getting new roommates!"

As the two youngsters were thrown into metal cells that were totally empty, a womanly voice echoed inside the cave, startling the nervous angels .

Radolf remained unresponsive, his eyes staring at the dark ground . However, Midolf was much more talkative despite his current, miserable state .

"Who the fuck are you?!"

He cursed at the chained woman, who didn't seem bothered by the nails stabbed into her bones or the chains stabbing his forehead and chest .

"My dear, handsome boy, I am Zaarae, hahahaahaha"

"Quiet! QUIET!"

The angel leading this floor banged his baton on prison bars while warning Midolf with his eyes, though he didn't even dare to face the restrained Zaarae, much less get close to her cell .

"Mhmm, you've got a nice and familiar smell..."-Zaarae

Author note: Zaarae; Parasite Empress, the Lady who reaps .

Chapter 577

"Where were you? I searched everywhere!"

Maxine's hair turned half-white but it was gradually regaining its original color . She looked a bit older and was holding her abdomen, clearly not as lively as before .

She went around looking for Lucy but the latter showed up out of nowhere, totally unharmed . Of course, she wore the mask and the pink hair and the bland face returned .

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After a thorough talk with Arthur, she decided to remain hidden to not arouse Forne's suspicions . If he knows that Arthur had recognized Lucy, he'll try to force him out of the Red Tower just to make sure he doesn't interfere later on .

Arthur stated that he won't participate in the battle against Leiu, however, that doesn't mean he won't be present . As his brother, he must assure that nothing happens to the Nameless Knight because Forne and the rest may try to kill him to permanently get rid of Sol'khin . It's a plausible solution but very hard,

if not impossible, to achieve . After all, they'll be facing the strongest person in the multiverse, even with flawless cooperation and a bunch of powerful experts, it's still difficult .

\ "The Bee escaped . Also, it's not our target . \ "

Lucy pointed at the tattoo on the back of her hand, explaining to Max how their target has three pairs of wings while Arthur's has only two .

\ "Whatever, let us find it . \ "

The player's mood seemed a bit down after fighting the Grey Seat . Apparently, whatever happened in that swamp made Maxine a bit cautious and no-longer carefree and hungry for constant fights .

...

\ "My my . \ "

Arthur chuckled while looking at his partner's miserable condition . She was puking blood, her hair messy and clothes ripped, revealing a lot of skin .

The woman ignored his mocking, clenching her fists and mumbling inaudible words .

\ "We're still here so that means you lost it? \ "

\ "Yes, a golem blocked my way, though I'll catch it next time . \ "

\ "What next time?! What if we don't find it! \ "

\ "Hey, woman, don't vent your frustration on me . At least I chased after it while you were getting your ass beaten . \ "

Celes ground her teeth, incensed even more by Arthur's words .

\ "She's lucky we are not allowed to kill other participants on this floor . \ "

The parasite shrugged his shoulders and patiently waited for her to recover, which didn't take long . Surprisingly, when she ate a few fresh fruits, her recovery accelerated and her body returned to its peak state .

Around ten minutes later, the two were on the road again, choosing the direction the Bee escaped to . Arthur knew that trying to use speed to catch the insect won't be easy so he came up with a better plan, one that is guaranteed to work . In fact, he doesn't even need Celes' help but had to keep her close .

The confusing thing is the rule he heard when he entered this floor . It clearly stated that a pair cannot be far from each other yet when he chased after the Bee, Celes was left behind and the distance was much greater than the one mentioned in by the tower .

So why were they not disqualified?

'Maybe the rule only applies when they're in possession of the target?'

The pair walked at a moderate pace, soon arriving at the foot of a medium-sized mountain covered by large pine trees . The place was filled with monsters and non-dangerous animals such as deers, it was quite a strange area to exist in the Red Tower .

The monsters weren't dangerous to God Monarchs, much less Overgods, moreover, it seemed that they weren't alone in there . Arthur and Celes sensed two more pairs wandering around the mountain, searching for something .

The first pair didn't even notice the arrival of new enemies, however, the second pair was composed of two people Arthur had already met . One was a short and bearded dwarf wearing a thick dark red armor and the other was a tall woman with hair matching her partner's armor . She was the reincarnator, Losha, who remained nonchalant even after detecting Arthur and Celes .

"It looks like you have to be close when I catch the Bee . "

"I can't keep up with your speed . "

"You don't have to . "

As he said that, Arthur's body melted into the ground and a small plant grew in his place . In the blink of an eye, it grew to a big tree, equal in size to the pine trees present all around them . One of the tree's branches, one thicker than the rest, descended from above, signaling for Celes to get on .

The woman did as told and managed to keep her balance despite the non-stop moving and growth of this tree . It towered over everything and its branches were stretching to all of the mountain corner's .

Actually, Arthur was imitating what the World Tree did in Astria . Using the countless branches he's able to grow, he'll be able to comfortably chase and trap the Bee in his domain . When it's finally cornered and has no room for escape, capturing it will be a piece of cake .

"It's that monster again! Damn his grandmother!"

The dwarf cursed as he saw a tree rising to the sky, its branches dominating the blinding canopy and blocking the sun rays .

"Don't mind him . The white deer should be hiding in the peak . "-Losha

Using Nature Magic and the Detection skill along with his Sixth Sense, Arthur located the Bee in just a minute but he didn't immediately act . He manipulated the root of the tree and was slowly taking over the whole mountain, changing it into his domain . The Quad-Spirit facilitated this job as it could use Earth Magic and get rid of anything that attempts to resist .

"Did you find it?"-Celes

Arthur telepathically replied to the woman, his voice resounding inside her head:

"Yes but I need more time so I can barricade the mountain . "

The tree grew so big to the point that the mountain was like an ant, its branches enveloped the whole area like a birdcage, letting not even a worm escape either from the air or the ground . The earth hardened and became jet black and very solid, rendering impossible to dig through it .

Meanwhile, Losha and the dwarf swiftly climbed to the top and circled around the deer, which was snow-white and had a red horn protruding from the top of its head . The dwarf pulled his axe and leapt at the animal while his partner remained standing in the opposite direction .

...

"It's done, brace yourself . "

Just as he said that, an ear-piercing and deafening thunderclap echoed, making Celes momentarily shudder . The ginormous tree was struck by a thick green thunderbolt, which enveloped it whole and affected the whole forest and mountain, pulverizing all the pine trees and revealing all that was hidden .

The Bee, which was quietly flying from one flower to another was alerted and started speeding up, heading directly outside of the area . Unfortunately, its path was blocked by thin branches with lightning on them, which forced it to hastily change direction . Alas, Arthur already finished his trap and all that was left was capture it .

Branches rose from the blackened ground, causing the Bee to bump into them and become unstable for a brief moment . The thick branch on which Celes was standing on was like a descending dragon, shooting at the Bee .

The insect buzzed and its four wings started flapping even faster once it sensed the incoming projectile . The branch wasn't as fast as the Bee, however, Arthur was able to manipulate thousands at once, easily controlling the target's movements .

As previously discussed with Celes, she'll be the one capturing the insect . Using branches that appeared out of nowhere, she jumped from one to another, shortening the distance between her and the Bee . Her body started releasing a dense fog which hindered the Bee, making it bump into more obstacles . So, like that, Celes was able to get very close to the Bee, which desperately turned around, attempting to flee only for electric vines to stop its mad flying, paralyzing it for a few seconds .

Celes' fingers unleashed two invisible blasts that made the target's wings decay, finally making the insect fall on the ground . At last, the Grey Seat picked the minuscule insect, causing a light to envelop her and the lightning tree .

Not long after, the birdcage made of branches along with the massive trees vanished, leaving behind a jet black mountain utterly void of any vegetation . The animals and monsters ran for their lives, getting as far away from the peak as possible .

Chapter 578

"It's so fast!"

Maxine swung her sword at the Bee, which was ten times the size of the one Arthur and Celes captured . It looked ominous with its six wings flapping endlessly and emitting yellow particles in the air .

The area they were in was previously a desolate land, an ancient battlefield, though it drastically changed due to Lucy's magma . It's as if a volcano erupted here, the ground was filled with red hot Lava and the heat was suffocating, it even made the female player sweat profusely .

Lucy changed the environment, making it unfavorable for the insect, which couldn't fly properly and ended up falling into a pool of lava after having four of its wings cut by precise attacks of Max . Before it died, Lucy managed to touch the Bee, allowing her and her partner to enter the 4th floor, at last .

\ "Contestant, welcome to the 4th floor, Alliance . \ "

Arthur found himself standing in a luxurious room with a lot of furniture, tables filled with foods and drinks, large and beautiful paintings, and golden and silver statues of what seemed to be commanders of various races, be it dwarves, elves, demons, or even fishmen .

Obviously, he wasn't the only here as he noticed the presence of many of the contestants . Some were unfamiliar and others were individuals he met or previously read or know about, like the Sword God, Tula, or the thief . There was even a large purple beast sleeping on the side, undisturbed by anyone, though many were throwing cursory glances at it .

*On this floor, your skills, techniques, spells, cultivation, levels... will be temporarily disabled . The task will be to defend the city from the foreign attacking force . To reach the fifth floor, you'll have to pass through the Sky Door . Cooperation of all the contestants will be needed to fight against the aliens and emerge victorious . You'll obtain points by killing the enemies and they can be spent in the luxury shop accessed on the menu .

Anything bought in the store will be accessible on the 5th floor . The event will begin once 501 contestants appear in the waiting room .

Current number of contestants: 389*

Arthur listened to the voice of the Red Tower, trying to understand what needs to be done .

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'It mentioned a task but it didn't say that it's obligatory to complete it . Can I go directly to the fifth floor if I pass the Sky Door?'

He contemplated over what was said, ignoring the gazes he was getting . Ever since his fierce battle on the 2nd floor, Arthur became notorious, moreover, he was already infamous in the Cloud Sea Universe .

He was the parasite banished by the monks to Riarravar, so his appearance here surprised many people .

The system was locked and, just like it was mentioned, almost everything was disabled . The only thing he could use was Dark Magic, it was available because it wasn't categorized as a skill or a technique . To use Dark Magic, he needs Dark Mana, which is something acquired by converting normal Mana . Fortunately, the talisman inside of him is capable of storing Dark Magic and, currently, there's a decent amount accumulated there . He just needs to use it wisely and not unleash all in one-go .

The Luxury Store is something any contestant can use, it functions like the system and can be opened anywhere . It's a small icon on the bottom left of Arthur's sight, it can be hidden and isn't really that bothersome .

On the 2nd floor, he obtained a decent amount of points, however, it didn't seem to be enough to buy anything useful . It has to be said that there were a lot of useful and miraculous items displayed in the store .

There were vials and elixirs that permanently increase your stats, empowers your cultivation, or even widens your meridians to increase your future potential . He even found blood droplets belonging to Divine and mythical beasts, though the prices were exorbitant, to say the least .

The true blood of a phoenix costs 5 million points... a frozen feather of an Ice Phoenix is 15 million points . Of course, there were equipment and even something that shocked Arthur, it was a seed of Dark Magic, something that only he can make . From the description written under it, Arthur realized that it's a more powerful variation of the ones he's able to conjure, moreover, it actually grants the user real Dark Magic, not artificial one like the Gutcha's . The price for this was a whopping 200 million points, the fourth most expensive thing .

The first was a Blessing Stone, the prize for winning the competition . Quite surprisingly, it can also be obtained if you have enough points... that is to say, 2 . 5 billion points . The second one was the Star Void Physique manual, the strongest of all physiques . What makes it special is that anyone can acquire it, you don't need to meet special requirements .

As for the third item, it a Void Spirit . Whoever buys it, will gain ownership and properly use it for his or her benefits . Void is the strongest magic so a spirit born from such an attribute is bound to be unimaginably powerful, it even made Arthur wonder how the Joker managed to capture one and put it in the store .

\ "In the end, what do you want from me?\"

Angelina looked at the crow sitting atop Moriah's head, her face frowning and confused .

\ "What I want? Aren't you the one who came here seeking questions? You visited my child's tomb looking for answers . Be responsible for your actions . \"

\ "Responsible? I didn't want to come here . I've been having those weird dreams and there is this thing inside of me . \"

Her tone was loud and berating as she lashed at the calm crow, also known as Bilgart .

\ "The thing, which you refuse to accept, is now a part of you . A machine created by Claud Venice, a human that lived in the Era of Beginning, precisely on this place, a planet called Serenity . He had the ability to see the future, hence the title: 'Prophecy Holder' . You two were married and your name was Angel... don't you think it's a coincidence? Angel and Angelina . \"

The white specter remained silent, glaring at the entity with clear hostility .

\ "Tell me, what is it that differentiates sentient beings from non-sentient ones? Is it intelligence or power? No, it's memories . Eternal things that make you who you are . You can deny your existence and your destiny but the memories engraved so deep into your mind cannot be erased . Angel was reborn as Angelina, her race changed and new memories were formed but through a series of events, she also

remembered her past-life . Whether it's a good or bad thing, it's for you and only you to decide . Quit burdening yourself with your sister or other people's lives and think of yourself, at least for once . \"

\"What is that supposed to mean? Burdening myself? I only want what's best for my sister!\"

\"No, you don't . If you do, you would not have brought her to the clan . \"

\"She needs to live with her family... not with some monster . Oblivious to everything . \"

\"She has the right to live with her family, she doesn't need to . Her destiny is with Arthur, it has and always shall be . Your interference was predictable but untimely, in my opinion . Then again, I only watch and whatever happens is up to the one making the decisions . \"

After saying that, a bright light emitted from the crow, shooting at the unsuspecting Angelina . Before she disappeared from the tomb, she heard Bilgart's voice again:

\"You can either continue your life as it is or seek the truth behind the ARK . Farewell, child . \"

When she regained consciousness, she was laying on a beautiful land filled with colorful flowers, the sky was blue and the sun was shining brightly . Everything seemed peaceful and her body was in perfect condition, no longer injured or whatsoever .

In her hand, there was a small piece of paper with a few words . The first part was something Bilgart engraved while the rest was a prophecy made by Claud .

'One card to turn the tables

One slash to cut the heavens

One strike to end his brethren'

Chapter 579

\"Say, teacher, isn't that woman G'am Tir?\"

Saly, who had woken up some time ago, pointed at Losha, who sitting in a quiet corner of the Waiting Room and reading a book in peace .

\"She is, why?\"

The young student, scratched her head in confusion before pointing at a middle-aged man dozing off not far from the reincarnator .

\"His name is also G'am Tir . Aren't they the same person?\"

The Joker laughed and patted her shoulder though the force he used caused Saly to fall from the chair and look at him resentfully while pouting .

\"My student has become so sharp... I wonder it's thanks to who . Hahahaha\"

After laughing for a while, his gaze fell on the man, contemplating whether to answer his student's question or not . In the end, he decided to spill the truth, after all, there was no reason to hide it .

\\"One is real and the other is a fake... a clone . You have Fenrir's eyes so why don't you try distinguishing who's the genuine one?\"

\\"But teacheeeee! You know I can't use them through a screen like this . \\"

Her eyes became that of a puppy as she walked up next to him and leaned closer, trying to force it out of him . Seeing this, Wolfram flicked her forehead, yet again causing her to stumble backward .

\\"Alright, stop with that fake shit . \\"

\\"No cursing . \\"

Leiu, who was sitting next to them, glanced at his brother and warned him before shifting his attention back to the screen .

\\"Hmpf!\" The Magician snorted, displeased but still refrained from using any vulgarities .

\\"G'am Tir was a genuine scientist who invented many miraculous things . His goal was immortality through science alone though he died before he managed to achieve that . However, he was still able to clone himself and store many fragments of his memories into them . That man you see there is one of the 'non-defective' clones and the last of his kind too but I doubt he'll last long . \\"

\\"But, if he's going to die soon, why not enjoy life instead of entering the Red Tower?\"-Saly

\\"Because there are duties and responsibilities to uphold . You can escape the hands of fate but can't fool Time . An artificial thing can live long but not forever . \\"

After going through all the items in the Luxury Shop, Arthur turned his focus to this waiting room, which resembled a very big office room of some filthy rich businessman . There were dozens of bookshelves, comfortable leather chairs and sofas, and tables filled with all sorts of delicacies .

He very much wanted to spend more time with Lucy but held himself back even after seeing Max and a pink-haired woman appear at the center of the room . The number limit is soon to be reached and all the contestants who're still on the 3rd floor will be disqualified .

Though, the distinguished individuals all managed to clear the given task and be teleported to the waiting room . There was the nonchalant 'X', whose appearance roused suspicions, the napping and terrifying Void Beast, the quiet Blacksmith, the feisty Maxine, and even the cross-legged Sword God .

Without exception, everyone present in the Waiting Room was a powerhouse and excelled in whatever they do . So, cliché battles that happen between arrogant young masters didn't exist here . Every one present kept their cool and minded their own business . Of course, they would size up anyone they find interesting but they did not openly provoke or cause a fight .

They wanted to reach the top floor so any battle occurring here is totally pointless... this made the atmosphere inside the Waiting Room rather peaceful and easy-going . Most took a corner and either meditated or rested while others tried to create temporary alliance .

Arthur wasn't approached by no one, and it was pretty obvious why . He was a parasite, something universally hated by all races, so no one in their right mind would go talk to him . In fact, many were glaring at him but, apart from those piercing stares, they remained passive .

"Is this really a dangerous place?"

A blue-haired girl with an emotionless face that strongly resembled her mother's, looked around, sensing or seeing no threat, contrary to what her guardian said .

A brown-haired man with a small beard nodded his head while correcting her:

"Of course it is! The only reason you're still alive right now is because the monsters are afraid of me . "

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Timos pushed away some large leaves that were on the way while dragging the stubborn girl by her hand . She wanted to cultivate in quietness but he insisted that she accompany him on his travels . He promised her that if she beats him, she can go wherever she wants but, alas, no matter how much she tried, she wasn't able to scratch him, much less defeat the Black Devil .

After traveling through dozens of Spatial Tunnels for the last week, they arrived at this star, where the vegetation is way too big to the point that a single leaf is twice the size of an average human .

"Your mother and father are so amazing so you can't be left behind . You inherited your mother's Yin power but you're much more talented in Water Magic which is why we came here... it's time for you to gain something unique . An ability that will facilitate the path ahead . "

"And what's this ability you speak of?"

She cutely rolled her eyes, seemingly uninterested but her body betrayed her as, despite him letting go of her hand, her feet didn't stop walking and followed right after him .

"Fire is over-popularized due to its different yet strong variations . There's the Phoenix, dragon, Vermillion Bird, so on and so forth... however, water only has one kind ever since the beginning . This is why mastering is difficult, almost impossible . In fact, throughout my life, I only met one person who perfect Water Magic, he's a parasite with the deserved title of an Archmage . "

He pointed at the dirt beneath his feet then said:

"This Star is the source of the first water ever created by Dmitra . Its healing properties are unmatched and its force is unequalled . "

He raised one finger, smiled and added:

"One finger and an ocean will move . One fist, an a star will split . "

The strategist was about to finish only for a rustling sound to be heard from not far away . He frowned and glanced at the source of the sound only to hear an even louder, explosive sound .

Several leaves and large trees were cut down and the ground slightly shook, actually surprising Timos . He raised his hand, causing the vegetation to move on their own and reveal the cause of this disturbance .

The area before them was supposed to be lush and filled with tall grass but, right now, there was only blood and a dying beast . A two-headed lion covered in flowers, its feet were cut and it was profusely bleeding from its head, clearly about to die soon .

Meters away from the beast was a young man, who was using a flashy sword to support himself . His clothes turned red from all the blood, his hands shaking and his breathing very heavy .

"It couldn't be just luck that brought us together for a second time, right? My ex-guest ."

Timos ignored the curious blue-haired girl and walked to the young man, who, with great difficulty, turned around and stared back at him . His beard was now gone and his blond hair was gone but those fiery eyes were instantly recognizable . This was Vyncent, who was last seen when Riarravar was being destroyed .

"Looking at you now... you must've gone through a baptism . It is quite good for you as it strengthens one's mentality... but I must say, you're one tenacious fella . Really, I am not joking ."

"Who's he?"

The girl ran to Timos' side and timidly asked, her cold demeanor no longer apparent .

"He, my dear, is something that should not exist but still exists . A bit like you but less favored by the natural laws hence his current state ."

Chapter 580

"Contestants, welcome to the 4th floor, Alliance City . In three days, the aliens will lay a siege to this city, please defend its inhabitants to gain points .

The gain will depend mainly on your kill count . Join hands and cooperate to protect the weak and purge the evil ."

Arthur heard the voice of the Red Tower just as he appeared in the middle of a busy street . Apparently, all the participants were randomly placed across Alliance City, which was big enough to house at least a hundred thousand people .

In this unfamiliar environment, Arthur was about to wander around to learn a bit about the military power of the city, however, he took one step then fell on the ground, his body refusing to obey him . His skin turned blurry and his vision unstable, moreover, all sensation vanished, leaving him with a certain numbness that felt very uncomfortable .

It was the same feeling that he experienced when he was banished to Riarravar . As he supported himself with a nearby wall in order to stand up, Arthur remembered something Timos told him .

...

"My dear invitee, do you think parasites are hated because of their infinite potential?"-Timos

\ "They can possess anything and gain their stats, isn't that the reason?\"

\ "Not all parasites can do that . Zaarae's children or the Calypso Parasites are able to possess anything that breathes, however, the other races abhor parasites because of their fast evolution . In terms of potential, every one is equal and that is proved by the current, still living powerhouses, which most are humans or elves . Yes, parasites gain the host's techniques, skills, stats, etc... but what's really fearsome is how fast they can progress . With enough corpses, a Parasite can become an Overgod overnight and that's a feat feasible only by them . Of course, I'm still talking about the higher-variations . \"

\ "What exactly do you want to say?\"

\ "You're a Soul Parasite hence your non-existent physical body, but everything that lives has a body and a soul, each one has important functions . Spirits and ghosts are drastically different so you can't be categorized with them... one reason is because your still vibrant and lively soul while theirs merged with their very being . Much like how a Godspirit fuses with their user in the Sovereign Realm . You must have experienced it, right? The feeling of nothingness? No pain, no anger... no love . Unlike what others think, the body is an essential think to be considered a being that's able to feel . \"

\ "...\"

Arthur listened without giving any reply, choosing to listen till the end .

\ "Soon, you'll be largely dissociated from feelings of sincerity and vulnerability- emotions which are central to forming strong romantic bonds . That is the one and only downside of being a Soul Parasite, which, in my opinion, is one of the strongest races in existence, if used correctly, that is . You get double the stats of the hosts and no longer need to actual bodies to transform from one appearance to another . That, and many other benefits... just for the sake of abandoning the ability to feel .

My dear guest, I know what you're thinking . For you, family is more important than power but how can one protect their close ones without enough strength? It's a bit contradictory, nevertheless, it's the plain truth . The more time you spend in your current form, the sooner you'll become an empty shell . \"

\ "What am I supposed to do, then?\"

\ "Have you ever heard of the Garden of Words? You have? Fantastic! Go there and ask for the path you yearn for, I'm sure you'll get a good answer . Though, be warned, when the last emotion disappears, there is no coming back . \"

A few minutes later, Arthur's state recovered but he was sure he lost something . an Emotion vanished but he had no idea what it is since he can no longer recognize it or experience it . With a dumb look and absent-minded, he remained in that position for an inordinate amount of time and only snapped out of it when a passerby bumped into him .

He looked around before choosing a random direction and starting to walk while inspecting the merchants and stores . He saw many races such as dwarves, elves, humans, and even demons, furthermore, they surprisingly got along with each other, seemingly very peaceful and easy-going .

His powers were sealed but Dark Magic was available which made him feel a bit more secure as he can defend himself if the need arises .

'Lucy must be somewhere in the city too...'

Even after fifteen minutes of walking, he didn't meet any of the participants, though it's not like he had met all of them .

While it's true that their skills and techniques were disabled, this case wasn't like Riarravar, which turned them into mortals . This means that Arthur won't feel hunger or fatigue as his stats were indeed lowered but, considering his how high they previously were, the difference wasn't much .

As everyone was dramatically weakened, Arthur's is more or less the strongest person on this floor . His physical strength alone is able to pulverize anyone, and that is without taking into account his ominous Dark Magic .

Speaking of Dark Magic, the parasite was startled as his eyes landed on small black fog under his feet . After a further inspection, he found out that it was a purposely made trail created to lure him into someplace .

The mere existence of Dark Magic in the Red Tower deeply shocked him so Arthur followed the black fog without any hesitation whatsoever .

The more he looked at it, the surer he was of its authenticity . It felt and looked the same but its concentration was a level higher than his, making him unable to absorb it as his own or immediately figure out the source .

In the end, he walked for around an hour before arriving at the slums, where he was getting hostile gazes, which he ignored, of course . The black fog led him to a shack that seemed to have been burned a long time ago .

Amidst the rubble and ash, there stood a dark silhouette with its back facing the curious and surprised parasite .