

Once Human 711

Chapter 711 - Hell Griffin

"Knowing your nature and Race, I do understand how you're able to create the isolated small worlds for the trials but I'm still confused..."

Isadore crossed his arms and pondered for close to a minute before turning his head to the quiet parasite.

Arthur was watching the wide screen hanging in the air, allowing every spectator to see what's happening.

"Did you catch some monsters in the past or what?"

It didn't make sense for the young King, after all, storage rings can't store living beings, and although Arthur is a parasite, he can't simply bring the corpses back to life.

True, Necromancy exists and can be used by the parasite, but the monsters on the wheel are not undead, only two of them are, therefore, Isadore Malfront was perplexed and consumed by his unending curiosity.

"It's temporary reanimation." Perfunctorily replied Lucy, her eyes still fixated on the MoonStar team. Although she didn't outwardly show it, she was still a bit worried for the youngsters. She only trained them for a week but she got attached to them... they are a lively bunch, sometimes annoying, but hard-working nonetheless.

The term temporary reanimation sums up this trial, or at least the summoned monsters. Initially, they were fresh corpses stored in Arthur's ring, countless monsters he possessed in the past.

Through Arthur's left hand, which can use Life Energy, he was able to achieve this thanks to a useful skill called [Short Life]. When used on a corpse, it will bring it back to life for a limited amount of time, but its stats will be 80% of the original and some of the monster's skills will not be available, especially the soul-related ones.

"Interesting... would you be willing to offer more details, Madam Lucy."

Contrary to the way he speaks to Arthur, Isadore was much more respectful to Lucy. They barely spoke to each other but what made him act like that was her constantly cold attitude and chilling eyes, which restrained him from acting overly-friendly or in a joking manner.

After he politely asked the silver-haired woman, Isadore instinctively jerked his body backwards, a bit startled as Lucy turned her head and stared back at him. She maintained a brief silence before giving a satisfactory explanation about [Short Life].

It wasn't only Isadore who was listening to this, the Kang Clan, sitting relatively nearby, also perked their ears and listened, clearly interested in this topic.

Kang Amidel, his two children, and the old man accompanying him, were pretending to be focusing on the screen but their whole attention was diverted to Lucy.

When the White Specter finished her explanation, which was fast but to the point, the old man softly chuckled.

"Such an ability could prove useful in waging wars."

Lucy did not comment on this, however, Isadore shook his head and corrected the elder.

"It is useful but not better than summoning Undead. Necromancy is unrivaled in reanimation."

"Wise words, your majesty."

...

"Spin the wheel, please."

No one from the MoonStar team discussed who'll spin the wheel. The bold Cristina stepped forward and, with a serious and determined expression, spun the large wheel. She didn't use any force but the wheel spun at a rapid pace for twenty seconds before progressively slowing down, at last stopping. The short white arrow pointed at one particular monster, named 'Hell Griffon'.

As luck would have it, the monster which will be facing the MoonStar team is one of the two undead displayed on the wheel. It's also the griffin Arthur usually used in the past.

After the wheel stopped, Gutcha picked it up and teleported away, taking the other team with him. They were brought to the back, outside of a large formation protecting them from anything that might happen in the square-shaped arena.

Time crept by, the members of the MoonStar Team spread out, their eyes focusing on the middle of the arena, from which an immense black hole appeared, and from within, a ferocious beast made of bones crawled forth.

"Well, shit!"

Cristina couldn't help but curse as the Hell Griffin appeared, two winged bones flapping slowly, causing the wind to rage. This, however, was but the beginning as black and red flames started covering the entirety of the monster, making it look more demonic and terrifying.

The Hell Griffin didn't wait for them to attack, its enormous body pounced on the closest human, Shu Ru.

The Goddess of Green Leaf, the fairy, as people called her, retaliated before she was struck. Her two raised were raised, her Godspirit materializing in front of her, blocking the incoming monster.

Shu Ru's Godspirit looked like a blinding pillar of white light, almost as big as the enemy. It floated in front of its caster, immovable, resisting the full blunt crashing of the Griffin.

Ardor and Bora were the next to act, the latter shooting two successive arrows, each embedded with a swirling green light. As for sword-wielding youth, he jumped in the air and stabbed his sword to the front, shooting a burst of concentrated Sword Essence at one of the griffin's bony and flaming wings.

The arrows struck first, momentarily distracting the griffin, whereas Ardor's attack managed to push the griffin a bit to the side, allowing the remaining members to follow-up with equally devastating attacks.

Cristina, though still injured and slower than usual, grabbed her spear with both hands and spun around, sweeping the spear horizontally and transforming into a black tornado made of an eerie black aura.

The tornado shot at the griffin's back, clashing with the black and red flames and even extinguishing them for a couple of breaths. Cristina's spinning sweeping spear hit the griffin's bones, shattering two and cracking a third one, causing the beast to angrily roar and turn its body to face her.

It was then that a phoenix' cry was heard, coupled with a cascading wave of flames crashing into the Hell Griffin, engulfing it whole and making its roars louder than ever before.

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"That's some unsightly abomination, alright."

Isadore threw a remark, both fascinated and surprised by the Griffin's appearance and power. The members of the MoonStar steam were at the God Realm yet they couldn't take it down, at least not easily. It required joint effort and flawless cooperation, which means that the Hell Griffin is at least a God Monarch Beast.

If the rest of the monsters in the wheel were as strong as this one then, as the Kang's elder had previously said, it'll be easy for Arthur to create an army of monsters using only the temporary reanimation.

"It still hasn't done anything." Calmly said Arthur, an evil grin forming on his usually expressionless face.

"So they can't defeat it? Isn't that unfair?"

"It's not. They have to attack it for five minutes then they'll be given a score. The prerequisite for success is not to kill it but to survive."- Arthur

"Aren't you afraid they'll get fatally injured?"

"Not really. Gutcha is there to keep a close watch."

Isadore nodded his head once, diverting his eyes back to the screen.

'Cristina's arm is heavily injured. Her bones are broken and if she over-exerts herself, it'll be harder to heal it.'

The powerhouses present here, including Arthur and Lucy, were able to see more than the normal cultivators. They didn't miss any details, so it wasn't difficult to notice Cristina's injury. She was trying her best to persist but it seems the injury is more serious than expected.

Before trying anything, Lucy first talked to her husband, who didn't give an immediate reply.

'I can still heal her but if you're that worried then I don't mind.'

Hearing this, Lucy frowned for a second and telepathically spoke again,

'Are you acting non-sympathetic because of what happened with Fariya? She and Cristina are not the same. The girl is our apprentice, are you really not worried about her?'

'It's not that I'm not worried, but I'm hoping that she uses this hardship to improve or perhaps even achieve a breakthrough.'

'It's still not worth it.'

'Alright then, I'll get her out.'

'No, wait. It'll be better if I do it.'

Lucy abruptly stood up, much to everyone's surprise. No one questioned her but the look on their faces indicated how curious they were, especially Kang Amidel and Isadore Malfront. Even Fariya, who was standing at the back, flinched, thinking that Lucy was about to do something to her.

Fortunately for the succubus, the silver-haired woman didn't even spare her a glance, she vanished from her spot and reappeared barely five seconds later.

In the screen hanging in the sky, above the plateau, the spectators saw how Cristina, who was enveloped by the black tornado, suddenly disappeared.

The black-haired, rebellious girl was, at first, confused and dazed, staring at the woman before her. She was panting heavily and even her arm was trembling, incapable of holding the spear for any longer.

Seconds later, the pigolo's voice resounded across the plateau, informing everyone of what just happened.

"The participant Cristina from the MoonStar team was pulled from the Trial and is now disqualified."

"I can still fight. I can-"

Cristina was cut off by the White Specter, who pulled her toward Arthur. From head to toe, the girl was covered in white light, which belonged to Life's Energy.

By the time Arthur dropped his left hand, Cristina's body was fully healed. The wounds she sustained in the brief clash against the Hell Griffin were nowhere to be seen, her outfit now clean and her spear repaired, back to its original state.

"Sit here and watch, we'll talk later."

Hearing Lucy's voice, which was softer than usual, the girl, although still displeased and feeling wronged, dropped her head and obediently sat down.

Chapter 712 -: Hell Griffin (2)

The MoonStar team had no time to lament over the disappearance of their comrade. Gutcha's declaration was loud and clear, at least making them slightly relieved that Cristina is in safe hands.

With one less person, the difficulty of the trial significantly increased. Cristina and Ardor are the main vanguard of the team and now one is gone, leaving the sword-wielding youth with all the pressure.

The Hell Griffin, no longer bothered by the black tornado and the spear sweeps, directed its attention toward the closest human, Ardor.

Its wings flapped faster, unleashing bursts of dark and red flames, covering the sky and the arena, even pushing everyone to the back.

Each person used a technique to defend themselves, Shu Ru's Godspirit extinguished the flames, Bora's arrows split the fire, Ho Qing's Phoenix fire clashed against the Griffin's and resulted in sparks and blast waves. Last but not least, Rosea, who stood at the far back and protected herself with a thick dome made of her signature pink-colored ice.

Unfortunately for the youngsters, the Hell Griffin had just started attacking seriously, its enormous body was being lifted to the air, its mouth, made of only bones, opening wide and spitting what seemed to be fingernail-sized moving mouths. The Void Mouths numbered in thousands, covering the sky and opening and closing with an unseen speed, making them even creepier.

Not knowing what to do against this unfamiliar power, the youngsters retreated to the back while using their defensive abilities. To their surprise, the void mouths easily devoured everything in their path, be it Sword Essence, ice, fire, or even intangible Energy the Godspirit was made of.

The onslaught of the Hell Griffin began, startling not only its disadvantaged opponents but also all the inside and outside spectators.

"You expect us to defeat something like that?"

Cosima, one of the two members of the Demonic team, creased her brows, visibly worried and stupefied. She turned her head and asked the motionlessly standing Pigolo.

Most of the other teams opted to stay away from the pigolo, disliking the ominous and sinister aura of Dark Magic which was emanating from his body.

"Not defeat, just fight for five minutes."

"That monster can defeat a God Monarch!" - Cosima

"Quiet, Cosima."

Marjory nudged her junior and signaled for her to keep her mouth shut, however, the demon girl didn't stop.

"Teams like ours will fail if we fight that. The ones with more numbers clearly have an advantage."

Hearing this, Gutcha snickered and shrugged his shoulders.

"So what? Some Trials favor big-number teams and others do the opposite. I have no say in this. Perhaps you'd like to talk to my boss? Should I schedule a private meeting?"

The last spoken questions were obviously to mock the angered Cosima. The pigolo motioned for her to sit down and added,

"If you don't like it then you're free to leave, no one's going to stop you."

"That's no what-"

Cosima was dragged to the side by Marjory, she was even forced to sit down, her body unable to fight back against her senior's domineering power.

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"I could've been there to help... I could have..."

Cristina muttered begrudgingly, sneaking a couple of glances at Arthur and Lucy. Now that she's been healed, she felt refreshed and in peak state. The pain and exhaustion were replaced by a sensation of clarity and power. Sadly for her, she was disqualified and could only watch her comrades struggle against the Hell Griffin.

The immense undead made of flaming bones had gone on an absolute rampage. One of its wings became jet black then it unleashed a huge amount of black flames, covering the sky and extinguishing Ho Qing's flames then blowing him to the ground, his body crushing on the arena's unbreakable tiles then rolling a few times before laying there, seemingly lifeless.

The next to get attacked was Rosea, who vainly retaliated by shooting over a dozen icicles at the incoming beast. The girl let out a desperate cry, raising another ice barrier, which barely blocked some of the blunt, though she was still hit, her left leg broken as one of the relatively large bones of the griffin's foot had stepped on it.

The only one who was somewhat managed to completely block and even injure the enraged undead monster was, surprisingly, Bora. He shocked the audience for the second time as he dodged the griffin's flames and the Void Mouths by zigzagging in a slippery manner while at the same time pulling his bowstring and firing one arrow after the other.

He always hit the same place, the bones on the griffin's leg wing, and after several successful attempts, they shattered in pieces, resulting in the fall of the large monster.

Bora's didn't hesitate, invoking his GodSpirit, which is a peculiar one, disposable after one use. His GodSpirit was actually an arrow, which can be used once every a long period of time as it takes time to recover, or so he told Arthur, at least.

The GodSpirit, or more precisely, the arrow, had a simple, unimpressive appearance. He put it in his bow and pulled the bowstring for the nth time, his hands trembling from exhausting and the extreme Nether Energy consumption. Still, the youth persevered and was able to shoot the arrow, which enlarged as it made its way toward the falling Griffin.

It traveled at a high-velocity, its size half of the griffin's wing and pulsating with a high concentration of Nether Energy. The falling beast was unable to defend itself, rendering it helpless against the incoming projectile, which totally pulverized its right wing and nailed it to the arena.

Knowing that this is their best chance to inflict as much damage as they could and perhaps even defeat the undead, the rest of the MoonStar Team joined Bora, each person using their strongest skill or technique.

Ho Qing, half-conscious and burned by the black flames, summoned the screeching Phoenix then immediately fell flat on his face. Rosea unleashed a series of pink ice that surged from the ground and, at a quick pace, made its way toward the target.

As for Shu Ru and Ardor, they cooperated, the former assisting the latter by significantly boosting his Sword Essence using her sect's mysterious cultivation technique.

Mirages of the sword-wielding youth appeared next to him, all of them imitating his actions, jumping in the air and stabbing their swords forth.

They weren't just intangible mirages, however, as all of them were able to piece the griffin's bones and, though not as strong as the main Ardor, still did considerable damage.

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Chapter 713 -: Cristina's Story (1)

The multiple attacks unleashed by the youngsters were effective, strong enough to break some of the Hell Griffin's bones and considerably slow down its movements. It roared unceasingly, the flames engulfing it growing more intense by the second, however, it still wasn't enough to protect it from the joint attacks.

The fight continued, sometimes one of the members of the MoonStar team would be attacked or blown away, but overall, everything proceeded smoothly. Five minutes, signaling the end of the third trial. Unfortunately, the Hell Griffin wasn't defeated but it was injured pretty badly, so much that it could no longer perform big leaps or use two of its bestial bony limbs.

Gutcha appeared amidst them, sending back the beast into that ominous, bottomless black hole and congratulations Shu Ru, Ho Qing, and the rest.

"The MoonStar team's results: One members disqualified, five passed."

The one who'll calculate the inflicted damage is neither the pigolo but a useful object integrated into the Griffin's points, allowing it to display damage values after the time was up.

A large, translucent golden number appeared dozens of meters above the arena. It shone brightly and indicated the numerical result earned by the MoonStar team.

"70 points. That's good, right?"

Isadore turned to look at Arthur, not knowing if that number, which was close to a 100, the perfect score, is relatively good or bad. The other teams need to undertake the trial to as it'll allow the King, and the equally curious spectators to compare the rewarded points and conclude on which the strongest team actually is.

"The next team will begin in 10 minutes." Declared Gutcha with a loud and clarion voice.

The MoonStar team, instead of being teleported to where the rest of the teams were, were taken to the plateau.

There, the exhausted and wounded youngsters laid on the ground, breathing heavily as they wiped their sweaty foreheads and stretched their sore and tired bodies.

"Good job."

Lucy and Arthur appeared next to the MoonStar Team, Cristina standing a little behind the couple, her head dropped, feeling ashamed.

"We did well, right teacher?"

Bora proudly smiled, comically puffing his chest as he stood up. It was rare to see Lucy praise them or smile, so this made the youth energetic and satisfied with his efforts.

The rest were also pleased, whether it's the silent Ho Qing, the shy and reserved Shu Ru, or the arrogant Rosea.

"I feel we could have done better if..."

"If what?" Asked Arthur, his eyes slightly narrowed, startling the youth.

"Cristina was injured and had to be pulled out of the competition. I don't want to hear anything about that, understood?"

As he said that, the five of them meekly nodded their heads and maintained their silence.

"It will take for the other teams to finish. Arthur will heal you and, after that, either go recuperate or go watch."

Once she voiced her thoughts, Lucy turned around and disappeared along with the silent Cristina.

Lucy stood before Cristina, not talking for an indeterminate amount of time. She changed her hairstyle, making a pony-tail out of her long silver hair. She also changed her outfit, from the exquisite dress to a simple black tank top and casual shorts, which only covered half of her thighs.

"I'm sure you're frustrated. I will lower my cultivation to match yours."

At first, Cristina was perplexed, raising her head and frowning at the now-changed Lucy.

"What's wrong? Did you not want to vent your anger?"

In response to Lucy's provocative question, the girl let out a roar and charged at her teacher with her spear. Everything she couldn't do in the arena, she did it here, whether it's her strongest techniques or her spectacular moves, which were degraded due to her rising anger and current emotional state.

No matter from which angle Cristina attacked, how powerful and explosive her aura and spear techniques were, they didn't graze Lucy. The sports clothes remained intact, a bit sweaty but that was it.

After 10 minutes, Cristina started feeling helpless and incredibly weak. She was hyperventilating, her arms shaking and her eyes watery. Please visit freewebnovel.com

"Don't cry, attack."

Lucy's voice, which was softer than usual, snapped the girl out of her momentary daze. She shot forward, her black spear releasing an ear-piercing screech as it cut through the air itself, its sharp edges coated with a dark grey aura, swirling like a vortex and expanding in size.

The aura wanted to engulf Lucy whole, however, the moment it touched her skin, it shattered into nothingness.

Time passed and the fight continued, one side attacking and the other defending. It lasted until Cristina had no strength to lift her finger, her Stamina and Nether Energy were depleted, and if she had the System, she'd have noticed that.

Despite that, the stubborn girl refused to give up, forcing her body to stand up, grab her spear, and attack again.

"Do you know what your problem is?"

Hearing Lucy's rhetorical question, Cristina looked at her with half-opened eyes, the tiredness already forcing her consciousness to shut off.

"You're too mistrusting. In the second trial, you relied too much on yourself and ended up injured. You don't trust your team and think you're better off alone."

"I understand that you've just met them, but, if you want to stay in the team, you'll have to learn. Learn how to cooperate and trust your back to them. If you cannot even do that, you won't reach far."

Lucy briefly paused, thinking about something, then added,

"Arthur didn't want to pull you out of the competition but I did. And, mind you, he and I rarely disagree on something. He saw potential in you but he disregarded your character, while I did the opposite, I judged your character before your talent and achievements."

She walked toward the kneeling Cristina, stopping right in front of her.

"I started to suspect that you've come to our sect to seek refuge. You were never planning on joining a team or taking the tournament seriously. Now, I think it's more complicated than that... maybe you can tell me the full story yourself?"

She supported Cristina, who kept her silence, and took her to a large room somewhere at the base of the tower situated at the center of the city.

Even without Arthur's Life Energy, Lucy had Potions, Elixirs, and Pills, which, though not as effective as the Parasite's magic, can still heal a patient and restore some of their energy and Stamina.

Lucy patiently waited for the girl to recover, have a shower, and change into a set of new and comfortable clothes, though they weren't suitable for fighting.

When everything was finished, Cristina was motioned to sit next to Lucy.

Although Lucy was a strict teacher and never easy on the whole team, she did care for them. In fact, her current actions prove that she wanted to help Cristina.

Strangely enough, Cristina felt the urge to speak her head, and speak she did.

Chapter 714 -: Cristina's Story (2)

Cristina Ver Castro, daughter of a Duke of the Tartania Kingdom. The Dark Blaze Realm is a High-realm and is bigger than Green-leaf, housing clans, sects, and even mortal Kingdoms.

Cristina's home is the Tartania Kingdom, one of many kingdoms and empires in that realm. In the Dark Blaze, specifically, each kingdom, although inhabited and ruled by mortals, the royal family and its entourage are all blessed by unique abilities or prodigious talents, and Cristina's family was no exception, of course.

The strongest sect in the realm, the Dark Blaze Sect, would secretly send powerful cultivators to forcefully abduct young talents and integrate them into the sect. Generally, the families of the abducted youngsters would rarely object, after all, it's a good thing to enter a huge sect such as Dark Blaze. You'll be treated with a lot of respect and in a century or two, you'll grow into a capable and strong cultivator, who'll be able to defend his home from invading forces.

Cristina's father, along with the King, were adamant and refused to give up neither Cristina nor any one from their kingdom, which led to a one-sided massacre. A genocide. The capital was razed to the ground and only a handful of people were spared, two of them being Bora and Cristina Ver Castro.

Of course, young Cristina and her childhood friend were unwilling to die in vain so they were taken to the Dark Blaze Sect. Furthermore, the two displayed astonishing talent, becoming two of the best disciples there in just three years.

The Patriarch of the sect, along with the elders, paid close attention to the two youngsters, providing them with priceless pills and extraordinary cultivation technique, as well as magical artifacts... high-graded Weapons, such as the spear or the bow, in possession of, respectively, Cristina and Bora.

All seemed well, at least on the outside, till Cristina and Bora fled the sect. They still have not forgotten what the sect did, how they killed their families, friends, and everyone else.

In fact, the Patriarch already knew that the two of them would attempt something, but, unfortunately for him, he underestimated what they could do, hence, when they escaped the realm, he only sent one elder after him, which, apparently, wasn't enough to capture and bring back their two most extinguished disciples.

The gist of the story is; Cristina was forced to enter the sect that destroyed her home kingdom, and killed her loved ones. As Lucy initially predicted, she came with Bora to the MoonStar sect for protection.

Arthur and Lucy were very famous in the Cloud Sea Universe, as unstoppable monsters which were able to destroy the White Specter Clan and wreak havoc in the Divine Planet.

Even though the peculiar couple had countless enemies, including the Holy Dominion, Cristina knew that the Dark Blaze Sect wouldn't dare to provoke the MoonStar Sect. Put simply, the Patriarch and the elders weren't strong enough to take them back if they are under Arthur and Lucy's protection.

Cristina Ver Castro wasn't that knowledgeable about the couple, however, she knew that the parasite and the white specter could kill Exalted Gods with ease, and this fact was clearly showcased when the Red Tower was destroyed. Although cornered, Lucy and Arthur had managed to fight their way out and safely return home, proving to the whole Universe that they're not pushovers. There is the matter

concerning the banishment to Oblivion, which should have imprisoned the parasite forever inside, but, against all odds and to everyone's astonishment, he returned unscathed and stronger than ever.

These reasons, though not numerous, were backed with undeniable evidence, thus making Cristina bet her life and Bora's on the MoonStar Sect.

With her fists clenched tightly and head lowered, eyes shamefully looking at the ground. The young girl, only 19 years of age, felt guilty and embarrassed as she recounted the full story to the carefully listening Lucy.

"I was going to lay low but..."

She slowly and hesitantly lifted her head, meeting Lucy's gaze.

"But when I was picked to be part of the team, I was excited. I felt that I was finally recognized... I was even happier when I saw myself progress with your training. I knew that, with enough effort, I could grow as strong as you and kill those bastards. All of them."

The girl paused, caressing her arm, which was previously injured. Please visit freewebnovel.com

"But when they attacked me in the second trial, I wanted to kill them. To show the Patriarch that they could no longer take me back. I didn't want to implicate the others. Really, that was all I was thinking about."

"Whether you like it or not, Bora and the rest will get involved. You're part of a team, and a team acts as a single entity, sharing a common goal. In the future, there may come a day where Shu Ru or Ardor would need help in their personal matters and I believe you won't shy away from helping."

"I don't want my friends to be hurt..."

Cristina's eyes were watery as she spoke with a barely audible voice. Lucy softly smiled back at her and caressed her head,

"That's not up to you."

Lucy thought for a moment then took out a white handkerchief, gently wiping the girl's wet eyes and the tears trickling down her cheeks.

"You've been with them for only a week but you see them as friends. That's good because I'm sure they feel the same too. The only thing you have to tone down is your hot-temperedness."

Lucy ended with a joke, to which Cristin, still quietly whimpering, chuckled then started coughing as she choked on her tears.

"Don't worry, Cristina. As long as you're in the sect, no one can hurt you. No one. You do trust me, right?"

"En!"

"Good girl. Before I forget, try this for me."

Lucy walked away for a few seconds and returned with a plate filled to the brim with brown and beige cookies.

"I made this for Arthur but I need someone to taste them first."

Cristina nodded her head and took one cookie, taking a small bite and slowly munching it.

"It's delicious."

"Really?"

"Yes!"

"Thank you." Said the silver-haired woman, winking at the girl and putting the plate on the table.

Actually, Lucy already knew that they tasted good. When she started cooking, a long time ago, she wasn't that good, however, after spending time on Earth and learning from the best, her culinary skills became practically unrivaled, at least in the mortal realms.

She asked for Cristina's opinion only to lift her spirit and change the topic into a more light-hearted one.

"You can eat more if you want."

"It's okay, I'm full." Shyly said Cristina. She looked different than her haughty and proud self, perhaps her emotions still in disarray.

"Okay. When you're ready, let's go watch the rest of the competition. I'm sure your friends will be happy to see you cheering for them."

"Your team is struggling, Your Majesty."

Arthur chuckled as he gave a side glance at the blonde youth, sitting there, looking nervous and slightly restless.

After the MoonStar Team passed the third trial and earned 70 points, the elves fought next. They were lucky, the white arrow of the large wheel stopping at the mutated earth dragon. The nine elven ladies were all bow users and were able to kill the dragon with relative ease, thus earning them a perfect score.

The next team on the list was Isadore's, four youngsters, two girls and two boys, all dressed in matching black and golden robes, not too loose nor too tight, perfectly fitting their slim bodies.

The four were all at the God Realm, between the 3rd Grade and 5th grade. They worked flawlessly together, however, they weren't as strong as the other teams, not individually, that is.

The King's personal team had to fight a white spawn, a being born from Life and Light energies. It looked like an angel; Two large and holy white wings, a heavy set of silver armor, and a handsome genderless face. The creature wielded a small round shield on its right hand and a longsword on its left.

"What terrible luck!" Said Isadore, visibly annoyed at the mere sight of the white spawn.

"It's not that strong." Mockingly retorted Arthur.

"For you, not for them. Hmpf!"

The young king snorted and straightened his back, leaning to the front and instinctively clenching his fist.

It's not to say that his team was weak, just that they were matched against an airborne monster, agile and dexterous.

Unfortunately for the King, by the third minute, the four members were seriously injured and had to be escorted to the outside by the pigolo.

"The Green-leaf team Has been disqualified."

With Gutcha's declaration, the crowd's cheering became louder, either happy that one team lost or excited to witness the next fight.

As for Isadore Malfront, he stood from his seat and bowed toward Arthur,

"I'll excuse myself for a second."

The parasite waved his hand nonchalantly, "Do what you must... just don't forget our bet."

Chapter 715 -: The Kang Clan (1)

In the second Trial, two teams were disqualified, which is to be expected since there were only ten numbered doors. The third trial, however, didn't force any team out of the competition, at least not in the normal way, per se.

Hypothetically, all teams could possibly complete the trial by either surviving for five minutes or defeating the summoned monsters. Unfortunately, some teams were unlucky enough to face a monster that counters them, or more precisely, their techniques and ability, like what happened with Isadore's team, for example.

As Gutcha had previously said, each time was to fight for five minutes, or less if the monster defeats the youngsters. A ten minutes-long break was to be held after each fight, so, in total, the trial took exactly 133 minutes. Out of the ten participating teams, two more were disqualified, leaving only eight.

The defeated teams were King Isadore Malfront's team, named the Green-Leaf Royal Team, and the Blossom Merchant Company Team, which is composed of the bearded but young dwarves that had battled Shu Ru and the rest in the second stage.

The Demon Team, composed of the two demons girls, Cosima and her senior, Marjory, fought last. Their opponent was a two-headed poisonous snake, which, thanks to their high resistance to toxins, were able to defeat with relative ease, hence earning the perfect score, just like the elves.

With the third trial officially done, the host of the competition, Gutcha, displayed a detailed ranking of the teams and their earned points. The Ranking wasn't for only the third Trial but all three Trials, which means that the points the participants had earned previously also count.

1 The Imoogi Clan: 249 points (5)

2 The PoMo Forest Team: 222 Points (7)

3 The Ancient Federation : 200 Points (1)

4 The MoonStar team : 186 Points (5)

5 The Demon Team : 182 Points (2)

6 The Holy Church Team : 176 Points (2)

7 The Mermaid Team : 170 Points (9)

8 The Dark Blaze Team : 124 Points (1)

The number of participants decreased to 32 but there was a large gap between the first and last place, but that's to be expected since the Dark Blaze Team only had one member remaining. Nevermind the spectators, even Arthur was surprised to see that remaining youth last so long. He was able to survive for five minutes and inflict little to no damage to the monster.

Actually, the sole remaining member of the Dark Blaze Team wasn't that talented, at least not like Cristina or Bora. Sure, he was still one of top disciples of his sect but, compared to his talented and skillful peers, he's, at most, mediocre.

Apart from the Elves and the Demons, who got a perfect score in the third Trial, John was the next, earning a whopping 95 points. He would have gotten a 100 were it not for the time limit, which ended right before he dealt the finishing blow. Relatively speaking, MoonStar's score was on the lower part of the spectrum, as only two teams have gotten less than they did.

Furthermore, it was only Arthur's team that had lost a person in the trial. Their overall prowess was weakened now that Cristina was disqualified, however, that doesn't mean that they'll fail in the next trial.

"Those reptilian kids are a bit eerie for my taste." Said Isadore, who somewhat recuperated from the failure of his team. "I've never seen them speak as much as a word. Their Guardian, too, is as peculiar as they are. Look at him."

Isadore glanced at a middle-aged man, beardless, thin and tall, very tall, over two meters in height. His arms, neck, and legs, were covered in black and greyish scales, and so was his meter-long tail, protruding from the lower part of his back.

"I thought your Majesty wiser than to judge people by their appearances." Replied Arthur, scoffing at the young ruler, who simply snorted.

"Still brooding over your team's loss? You must've known they won't reach the final."

"I most certainly did but I can't help but feel shame. They lost so miserably, and to a White Spawn, at that. As their Guardian and the King of Green-leaf, I have an image to maintain."

"Your image has hit rock-bottom a long time ago, I reckon."

"What is that supposed to mean?" Please visit freewebnovel.com

Arthur covered his mouth in a vain attempt to mask his wide smile. Isadore Malfrent, though, was still feeling bitter over what happened.

"Mister Arthur, would you be willing to spare us a bit of your time?"

Elder Nord, the elder belonging to the Kang Clan, leaned his old body forward and politely asked the parasite.

Kang Amidel, who sat beside the old man, pricked his ears while pretending to be engrossed in the competition, which has come to a halt as all teams were given one hour of rest and recuperation.

Some Guardians joined their teams, offering them advice and providing them with high-graded artifacts for the next trials.

The rules of the competition didn't prohibit the use of any kind of artifact, including Zen Treasures, which, if used properly, can allow a God-Monarch to injure an Exalted God.

Arthur had delayed his inevitable discussion with Elder Nord for long enough, to when he was politely asked, he did simply nodded his head and stood up. Soon enough, the parasite, Kang Amidel, and Elder Nord were seated in a quiet and isolated room at the top of the tower, completely outside of the competition's premises, including the plateau.

Truthfully speaking, Arthur didn't know why the elder from the Kang Clan wanted to talk to him. Nevertheless, it's high time they sorted the misunderstandings between them and established what their peculiar relationship actually is. It's already a fact that the Kang Clan wants to help and maintain the safety of the last surviving titan, Astria. However, their way of approaching things is suspicious, to say the least.

"First of all, I'd like to apologize again for my sudden appearance. I've been sent here by the Patriarch to clear many things and provide a detailed explanation, which, I believe, would satisfy you and provide you with the answers you want."

Chapter 716 -: The Kang Clan (2)

"Okay, go ahead and begin, Elder Nord, I'm all ears."

Arthur made himself more comfortable by leaning back on the chair, folding his arms, and prickling his ears. Lucy should have been with him right now but he didn't call her because Cristina's matter was equally important and demanded great care and patience.

"It all began in the first Era." Elder Nord caressed his beard at a very slow pace, not wasting time with unnecessary topics and delving directly into the crux of the matter. "When the Titans were viewed as a noble and extinguished race. Our Kang Clan were supporters of the secondborn titans. We helped them with many things and, to return the favor, they granted us powers beyond mortal capabilities. The strength to vanquish our hateful foes, to live thousands of years, to split skies and seas, flatten mountains and even change travel through stars and planets."

Upon seeing Arthur's expression, Elder Nord nodded his head. "Yes, mister Arthur." A knowing smile plastered on the wrinkled old face. "In that era, the Kang Clan was a mortal clan that served the titans and were granted powers."

"Granted or blessed?" Asked the parasite, his eyes never leaving the elderly.

"Is there a difference? Both lead to the same results." Calmly said Elder Nord. "Our faith in the Titans grew stronger than ever. We promised them our ever-lasting servitude but they refused, all of them. My clan's records mention the first ancestor, who spent dozens of years traveling the worlds, visiting every titan and bowing his head, asking to be a servant for those godly beings."

"I find such behavior quite shameful. I mean, to travel world after world just to be a servant? Pardon my rudeness, but your ancestor seemed to be eager to work for someone else instead of sacrificing all that time to train and better himself."

"Our ancestor, was a wise man. In the First Era, the humans were not the dominant race... in fact, they were the weakest. Oppressed and helpless, their great numbers decreasing significantly every day, either by plagues or due to the revenge exacted by other races, mainly Demons. Our ancestor could have lent a hand but he knew that his power alone won't be enough, so he sought protection from the titans."

"And did he find this oh-so-precious protection? Looking at the present facts and how the Kang Clan still sands, glorious and mighty, I assume it's a yes."

"None of the secondborn Titans accepted, but the thirdborn ones did protect our ancestor and even welcomed him into their stars."

"Is there a difference between firstborn titans, secondborn, and thirdborn? Also, I thought Titan lived together and were not separated into multiple realms or stars."

Elder Nord stopped caressing his beard, resting his bony hand on his chest, and inhaled deeply.

"Titans." He said, his gaze landing for the standing Amidel for a couple of breaths. "were different than Humans. They did not live together because their opinions and values differed, however, that didn't make them enemies. They had accepted each other and chose simplistic solutions, that's all. As for your first question; the firstborn Titans are the first of their kind, the secondborns were birthed by the firstborn, so on and so forth."

Sensing that Arthur had no relevant questions that needed answering, Elder Nord continued with his story, or better call it: explanation.

"Our ancestor married a mortal woman and created the Kang Clan, and for more than one era, there was peace and prosperity. But, after, and even before, the Void Era, things changed for the worse."

"You mean the war launched by the human, right?"

"I won't call it a war, mister Arthur." Corrected the old man. "It's more like a massacre. The titans, albeit powerful beings, were too few to fight the humans, who were given more than ample time to learn their own techniques and advance their technology. Hence, shortly after the Void Era, almost all Titans were killed."

"So not all perished?"

"The majority. The ones that remained were the weakest of the bunch. The genes of the Titans were present in their bodies, ethereal or not, but to call them Titan is only half-right. They were a mix of Titans and humans, Titans and Elves, Titans and other races, basically.

So, just like they helped our ancestor, we helped them. The Kang Clan was amongst the strongest clans back then, we've even had a Patriarch who had reached the Mysterious Realm."

"But they still died, right?" Arthur said, linking what was said with the facts he was aware of.

"You're absolutely right, mister Arthur. They weren't just killed, but they were captured, tortured, then publicly executed. It was a showcase of human superiority and dominance."

"I thought it wasn't just the humans were attacked the Titans. Also, the reason behind the war was said to be the Titan's arrogance, oppression, and aggressiveness."

"What aggressiveness might you speak of? The Titans never interfered with the Humans. Never touched them or ruled over them."

"It's hard to believe such words when historians and scholars say otherwise. You can't mean to tell me that the Titans did not retaliate, did not spill human blood."

"Mister Arthur." Said Nord, intently staring back at the parasite. "I think we're diverging from the main topic but if you want to debate then I won't spare you. The Titans retaliated only later on, after the Void Era when it was clear that their extinction is nigh. They were being hunted and our Kang Clan wasn't able to protect all of them. Some of the remaining Titans hid in ungodly places, outside of anyone's reach, others changed into intangible forms, allowing them to live by unnoticed. In spite of that, the allied races were relentless, sparing no effort into finishing off all the Titans and erasing their trace from the multiverse. No race wanted the Titans, which were considered the perfect beings, to continue living. I guess you could call them cowards, afraid of what the Titans could or could not do in the future... because if the Titans really wanted, they could have conquered every world, planet, stars, or realm."

"But they did not." Solemnly stated Arthur. "And that does answer my question."

"It does, mister Arthur. It does. If Titans were truly oppressive, wouldn't they have subdued the humans when the first of their kin were slaughtered? Wouldn't they have eradicated the humans entirely?"

"Perhaps, by then, it was too late. As you know, it takes but a few decades for humans to increase their numbers. Titans, on the other hand, procreate at a much slower pace. I heard that their pregnancy lasts 9 years instead of 9 months."

"Procreation and numbers are irrelevant. Titans, as you very well know, mister Arthur, are strong beyond imagining. Even Titans born much later on, and relatively young-aged, wield powers that could smite an Exalted God in the blink of an eye. Don't you think that such prowess is largely capable of offering the protection Titans necessitated back then?"

"I don't think so, Elder Nord. You're a human too and you ought to know that humans have an infinite potential for evolution? Yes, not all of them grow into Exalted Gods or Transcendent Mortals, but that doesn't necessarily mean that they would not have been able to defend themselves were the Titans have retaliated."

"It's not about their individual power, but their motives. As a human, I'm ashamed of what my race, and other races, have done. Based on their baseless observation, they feared what may never come. They did not want a Higher race to exist alongside them. There's no justification and will never be. If you look closely at the history after the fall of the Titan, the Humans turned their wrath to the Elves and Fairies, which were initially their helpful and irreplaceable allies."

Chapter 717 -: The Bloodletting Experiment

"It's how the nature of the Human race works." Replied Arthur, releasing a heavy sigh. "Regardless of other races, whether they exist or not, Humans will always wage wars, conquer and kill. They'll do it to themselves if it comes down to it. But, Elder Nord, enough about this. Pray tell me what this is all about. What is the Kang Clan's stance? And why is it acting as such?"

"The Kang Clan." Said the old man, his old but lively eyes focusing on the parasite. "Stands with Astria, not the MoonStar Sect."

"I take it that you won't involve yourself with my sect?"

"We hope it doesn't come to that. As you may know, Mister Arthur, we have as many enemies as you do, all waiting for a slip. Just one slip. That's all takes it for them to attack us."

Hearing this, Arthur scoffed, frowning and folding his arms. "And that slip is siding with the MoonStar Sect, which has a White Specter and a Parasite as leaders?"

"Precisely so."

"Then what about your visit here? I doubt they're unaware."

"A visit is a visit." Answered the elder, shrugging and not bothering to explain himself properly.

"I'm still as confused as before this discussion started. What are your intentions? And please choose your next words carefully because they will decide whether the MoonStar Sect will see you as an enemy or an ally."

"Hohoho, mister Arthur, I see you're not afraid of the Kang Clan. Very well, I shall tell you as clearly as possible. Listen well. The Kang Clan will support Astria, the titan, in times of crisis. If- and I hope not - a disaster was to befall on your esteemed sect, you will see from us nothing but encouraging words."

"That concludes it, then."

Arthur's eyes narrowed, he straightened himself and clapped his hands. He glanced at the still-standing Kang Amidel, visibly nervous and wanting to express his thoughts but unable to do such due to Nord's presence.

"Mister Arthur, I don't think we're done yet. Astria concerns the Kang Clan and the MoonStar Sect. The recent events - currently inexplicable - which happened to the Titan, rendering it unreachable, should be solved by a joint effort."

"No. The Kang Clan should remain holed up in the Divine Planet or wherever the hell it is. You speak of your intentions but not once have I seen you act."

"I'd advise caution, mister Arthur." Elder Nord disliked the parasite's change of tone, which became aggressive and mocking.

"Caution from what? I know nothing about your clan, not even why all of you are empty shells. Yes, I can see what you truly are... something is not human, hence your unrestrained contempt for them."

"I never meant to trick you, mister Arthur. Our secret is irrelevant to the topic and there was no need to divulge something which is obvious to your special eyes. Above anything else, we want to assure Astria's safety and we hope you feel the same."

"Oh really? Funny that you say that, because when the Divine Beats attacked, I don't remember anyone coming to the Titan's rescue."

Upon hearing this, the old man helplessly sighed and vainly tried to explain in his clan's stead.
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"There were some unanticipated complications regarding that matter. Our hands were tied. Fortunately, you were there."

Arthur snickered and tore his eyes away from Nord. He waved his hand dismissively and unceremoniously while adding

"Fortunately, yes... Fortunately. Tell your Patriarch to mind his own business from now on. And I catch but a whiff of the Kang Clan in Astria then... well, consider yourselves warned. We're done here."

"Again, mister Arthur, I advice cautio-

"We're done, elder Nord. The door is open so see yourself out."

Elder Nord slowly stood up and meaningfully stared at the parasite before excusing himself. Amidel, however, stayed behind and only spoke after the Kang clan's elder had left.

"Now I see why you came to this wasteland, in the middle of nowhere. It's certainly better to raise your kids here, at least they'll have a normal life... and remain human."

"Mister Arthur." Kang Amidel courteously bowed, lowering his head more than necessary. "The Kang Clan is enigmatic and though its intentions remain unclear, I assure you that they mean well."

"Are you actually defending them? What will happen when they summon you back? No, let me- considering that you're bound to the city - rephrase that. What if they drag your son and daughter there? What if they subject them to whatever blasphemous and inhumane rituals they conduct on everyone? Will you still be saying the same words to me? It's time you wake up, Amidel."

"..."

Instead of retorting, the man stood there in silence, neither agreeing nor disagreeing with the parasite.

"I have eyes, Amidel. I have the System. I can see many things with just one glance. The cultivators may not deign to acknowledge it, but the System is capable of showing one's deepest secrets, easily and without effort. I looked at Elder Nord and I've seen enough, more than enough, in fact. The Kang Clan is dangerous and even if you guarantee it, I would've never accepted them as an ally."

Kang Amidel maintained his long silence, listening to Arthur's words, which could not be denied for they were the truth and he knew it, which is exactly why he kept his mouth shut.

"I can assure you, however, that were the Kang Clan were to butt in into my affairs and were I to exact revenge, I won't attack you. I don't know about the circumstances but it's crystal clear that you isolated yourself from the main branch."

...

"Wow! Arthur MoonStar in the flesh! As stoic and grim-faced as usual."

Edward Ortberg, the military general of the MoonStar Sect and - currently- a notorious person who marched the undead army in every corner of the Wasteland, conquering small and big tribes alike.

He was sent away for a special mission and came back just today. Despite being but a mortal, the man wasn't scared to fight Immortal and Divine beings, relying on his tricky yet deadly strategies to achieve one victory after the other.

Edward Ortberg laid siege to every fortress and stronghold that could be found in the wasteland, defeated the Pigolo and Naga tribes.

"Is it done?" Said Arthur, walking past the mortal serial-killer, who followed him while enjoying a delicious and juicy red apple.

"Yes, all in order. Since the beginning, we lost 3,205 undead, 7949 are incapable of normal movement, 25,000 are stationed right outside of the city. 15,000 undead are at the Naga Tribe, keeping those humanoid snakes in check. I also had to station 10,000 in the fallen Pigolo Tribe. They attempted resistance but were defeated the very same day, poor fellas. In addition to this, 4,500-

"Oh spare me the arithmetics and tell me the results."

"The results are pleasing, O' mighty parasite. The warriors of the Naga and Pigolo Tribes joined our ranks, though their numbers aren't particularly high. In total, there are 3,000 of them. I have to, however, praise their individual prowess, especially those chieftains or whatever they call themselves as."

...

Appraisal results of Elder Nord, an elder from the Kang Clan.

***Nord Radivsca (Race: Empty Hollow)**

Nord Radivsca Kang (Race: Empty Hollow)

Cultivation: Exalted God

Age: 2,670 years old.

Titles: Inhumane / Viscious Killer / Blood Seeker / Holder of the Hollow Oath / Guardian of the Kang Clan / The Merciless Man

Skills: Evisceration (Lv: EX)(Upgraded)(+680% damage) / Atomic Incineration (Lv34) / Hollow Bite (Max Lv)

Description: The Guardian elder of the Kang Clan, in charge of the diplomatic affairs and assuring the protection of his kin. Born and raised in the Kang Clan, son of Jainrar Radivsca Kang, the 29th Grand Elder of the Kang Clan (Now deceased). Nord was human until the age of 6, where, like anyone of his age in the Kang Clan, subjected to the Hollow Ritual, an ancestral and secretive experiment passed down from the grandson of Manxois Kang, the ancestor and founder of the clan.

The System detected and linked facts known by the Parasite for a better overview and explanation of the appraisal of the target: Nord Radicsva Kang.

The Hollow Ritual (Genetic experiment, also known as, The Bloodletting Experiment): The experiment was initially invented by excommunicated prists of the Night Church (2n Era, Year 1373-1374), then improved by Black Mages in Year 1386.

Year 1401, it was found by the grandson of Manxois Kang, Steffan Abra Kang, who integrated it into the clan as a mandatory ritual for all children between the age of 5 and 8. The success rate of the experiment was increased over the years, now reaching 75%. The subjects, however, will experience an unimaginable amount of pain for a prolonged period of three to six months, depending on the body. The first step is to inject unknown genes into the body then immediately suck all the blood while still keeping the heart beating. Then, the chest is carefully opened so that the genes could be injected into the heart as well. The scalp is next, lastly followed by the neck... the second important step is removing the body's skin and, quite literally, letting it dry then pouring 5 liters of black magic residue, which must first be liquified.... the third step is...

Chapter 718 -: The Theme

"By any chance, you wouldn't mind if I joined you on the plateau, right? I'm eager to watch those energetic youngsters compete. It makes my blood boil just thinking about it!"

Edward Ortberg hugged his arms and smiled, to which Arthur grunted but did not object. He didn't even wait for the mortal, he just teleported back to the plateau, precisely in front of his seat.

The only difference from before is that Elder Nord had left, though Amidel and his children were still sitting there and enjoying the competition. The fourth trial was about to begin, the remaining participants healed from their injuries and recovered their Nether Energy.

Even Lucy was back, with Cristina to her right, her face brighter than before. No more did she look begrudged and wronged, a soft, encouraging smile was displayed on her face as she stared at her team.

"Ladies and gentlemen, it's finally time for the fourth stage! I will explain the rules shortly."

As usual, Gutcha brought the remaining teams to where the trial will take place.

"Something the matter? You looked much grumpier."

Isadore noticed Arthur's deep frown, which wasn't present before he had left. The observative young king also saw Elder Nord's empty and was able to piece things together even without hearing any answer.

"Greetings! Greetings! Greetings! Greetings, your Majesty. Greetings, Madam Lucy."

Edward Ortberg appeared a minute after Arthur, as excited as before, greeting every person in his way, even though he knew not their names, only Isadore Malfront and Lucy were the exceptions.

Lucy nodded back at him but did not utter a word, but the King of Green Leaf was different, he sized the mortal up and down, curiosity welling up inside of him.

"Edward Ortberg, Commander of the Undead Army of the MoonStar Sect, I presume?"

"In the flesh, Your Majesty."

"I have heard of your recent achievement. Truly commendable. I've been wanting to talk to you about"

Isadore was interrupted by the grumpy Arthur, who signaled the mortal to sit with narrowed eyes.

"There's nothing to talk about, Your Majesty."

"I didn't know you're so protective of your subordinates, O'parasite."

The King grinned unpleasantly and kept his eyes fixated on Ortberg.

"There's no need to pretend, I'm sure you've done a thorough investigation. I see no reason for you to talk to him. For once, mind your own business, Your Majesty."

"Yes yes, sure. I was merely curious."

...

"The fourth trial, my dear participants, is simple and easy."

The pigolo declared with a truly hideous smile, pointing at the misty forest at his front. In response to what he said, three or four youngsters snorted, clearly disliking Gutcha's tasteless humor.

Ever since the beginning, he kept repeating the same words, stating that said trial is simple and whatnot. However, the truth is, literally, the opposite of whatever he says. Whether's passing a bridge, finding a door, or fighting a random monster.

"The goal to pass the fourth Trial is, put simply, crossing the forest. You'll have to pass through the mist and emerge from the other side. I told you, eh? It's easy and direct. No tricks. All teams will begin from the same starting point, they're free to fight each other and whoever gets seriously injured will be disqualified, of course. Cooperation, even between teams, is likewise advised for there are no small amount of dangers lurking here and there. The time limit is two hours and whoever reached the end succeeds the trial."

Eager, Gutcha joyfully clapped his hands and vanished from their sight.

The remaining 8 teams, 32 participants in total, warily looked at each other for an indeterminate amount of time. No one dared to make the first move, fearful to be attacked or followed.

Finally, after what seemed to be an eternity, the youth named John, belonging to the Ancient Federation, was the first to step forward. Within but a couple of breaths, his silhouette vanished amidst the dense mist enveloping the entirety of the forest.

The second to tread inside the mist were the five young Imoogis, all-male and with short black hair, long tails, and jet black scales covering parts of their bodies.

"Do we go inside too?"

Bora, the bow-wielding youth as well as Cristina's childhood friend, looking around cautiously, his weapon in hand and an arrow already held by the tip of his outstretched fingers.

"We have no choice. Shu Ru and I at the vanguard, Ho Qing and Bora will take the rear and Rosea in the center."

None disagreed, they quickly got into position, each person guarding a direction. With slow and careful steps, they made their way into the thick mist, which made it impossible to see beyond a couple of meters.

The forest was lush, with thick bushes, tall trees, and the ground riddled with holes and human and animal bones.

"Did you not create that place? Why is there bones?"

Edward turned to the parasite and asked, genuinely confused.

"The sight of bones and cadavers incite fear and worry, even amongst such talented youngsters."

"So it's just decoration? Shame, if you'd let me do it, they'd be pissing their pants already."

"The goal is not to horrify them using the environment, the goal of the Trial is to defy and overcome themselves."

"Overcome themselves? What's that supposed to me?"

"..."-Arthur

"Come on, you know I'm new to all of this. At least offer a good explanation devoid of riddles or philosophies."

"It's not a riddle or a philosophy." Corrected the blonde-haired Isadore. He was intently looking at the wide screen hanging on the sky, his mouth explaining his point of view and what he understood of the trial so far.

"If I'm not wrong- and I don't think I am - each trial has a theme. The first tests the reflexes and how to cope with danger when the ability to fly is absent. The second... hmm, the second is definitely luck. As for the third, clearly, it's cooperation and strength, though it has elements of luck too. How is it, Arthur?"

"Close but not to correct."-Arthur

"The second Trial was not about luck. All teams had an equal probability of succeeding, they just had to obtain the required number from another team to pass through the numbered door."

"What was its theme then? Argh! Those Naga really made me miss the spectacle."

Lucy looked at the serial-killer, her piercing eyes were coupled with a chilling frost, which even made someone like Edward, who's not scared that easily, shiver momentarily and avoid her gaze. He didn't have the chance to meet her a lot but, in his opinion, she's scarier and way more mistrustful than her husband. It's as if her eyes would turn him into an ice

"There was no theme. Basically, it was a battle royal, nothing more."

"I guess I was overthinking it, then."

"What about the fourth trial? Is there a theme, Madam Lucy?"

"There is." She perfunctorily answered, maintaining silence for a few seconds before, unexpectedly, giving a rather detailed explanation for the mortal.

"Each person has a contradicting inner-self, called a demon in this Cloud Sea Universe. It symbolizes their deepest and most twisted desires. It comes in many shapes and forms and is usually a hurdle for cultivation, barring their way into the next Realm. If they manage to defeat it, or accept it, their future cultivational endeavor will become much easier."

"Oh ohh! I understand. Does that mean I have a demon living inside of me?"

"You're the demon." Commented Arthur, giving the man a half-hearted glance.

"That is not true. I have sinned and I paid for my wrongdoings. I regret killing those people and, in my humble opinion, I paid my due."

"Congratulations, mister Edward. You're now a reborn man, liberated from his crimes." Isadore butted in, again, speaking with a half-sarcastic half-serious tone.

"After leaving the prison, I have discovered..." Edward paused, looking at the spectators than at the King and, at last, at the parasite. "That my crimes are nothing compared to the godly beings living in the universe. In comparison, I killed but a few, a minuscule, unnoticeable amount."

"While that may be true, mister Edward. There's a difference between killing out of necessity and killing out of pleasure."

"Nah, don't think so! Killing is killing. The means don't justify the ends. There is no evil in this world, just two parties with different perspectives and beliefs."

"That's debatable. You can kill one person to save a million, and there's killing one person just to feel pleasure. For the thrill."

Edward shrugged his shoulders, disagreeing with the King's words.

"By saving that one million, you'll kill even more. One million... that's a big number, Your Majesty. Some of them will kill people - hmm- let's say a thousand of them kills ten each. That's ten thousand. So, keeping the killer alive will give the best result."

Chapter 719 -: Ho Qing

"Stay close!"

Ardor repeated again, his eyes jumping from one spot to the other but all he could see was a dense mist. Ghastly howls and strange croaks reverberated from all directions, making the group of five tense and on full alert.

They walked in the same formation for ten minutes before one of them vanished. Ho Qing seemed to have disappeared into thin air, even when his companions called for him, they were answered by a brief and eerie silence.

This was but the beginning of mysterious and sudden disappearance. Rosea, who was at the center, also evaporated into nothingness, leaving in her place the ever-so-spreading thick mist, separating Bora from the rest.

Like that, one after the other, the members of the MoonStar got separated, all within fifteen minutes, at most.

...

The youth, quietly breathing, cautiously and carefully inspected his surroundings, which seemed to have dramatically changed. He was no longer in a misty forest but in a grandiose hall, a very familiar hall. He didn't call for his membres or move unnecessarily, he stood still, held his breath for a couple of seconds, and circulated his Nether Energy, ready to retaliate in case something attacked.

The hall was exquisitely decorated, orderly pillars made of shiny crimson granite, silver marble under his feet, and the rest was emptiness, purposefully made to glorify the pillars and the floor.

The youth, red-haired, sharp facial features, a slim body, and fully-opened eyes, showcasing vigilance and a slight anxiousness.

Ho Qing kept holding his breath, afraid that any sound might lead to the expected inevitable result, which is being attacked by the unknown enemy, lurking somewhere around, shrouded by invisibility.

More time crept by and the hidden enemy could wait any longer, lunging at Ho Qing, enveloped by a burst of orange flames.

Ho Qing retaliated almost immediately, moving both hands and punching the incoming enemy, also unleashing flames, though his were stronger and more ferocious, as is every fire belonging to the Phoenix.

The youth's fist clashed with the enemy, hitting his face and blowing him dozens of meters to the back. It was only then that Ho Qing had a clear view of the assailant, who, surprisingly, was his carbon copy, more or less.

The fake Ho Qing resembled his past self... the missing arm, the unrestrained anger, and the ferocious eyes blazing with anger and rage.

Ho Qing didn't speak or question what's happening, he backed away and shot two large fireballs, which split into multiple smaller ones once they were close to the target. Wave after wave of phoenix flames engulfed the copy, making him writhe and wail, his clothes burnt and his expression distorting inhumanely.

"How could you go under him? He's our enemy! He destroyed everything!"

"..."

Instead of needlessly replying, Ho Qing attacked again by leaping into the air and spreading his arms like a bird, his Nether Energy exploded forth, enveloping him wholly by a gigantic screeching phoenix.

The granite pillars and the marble ground melted, the phoenix fire spread to all corners of the hall, turning it into a hellish inferno. The copy wasn't even able to resist, his body turning into ash as the descending phoenix crashed into him.

It was supposed to be a long and tiresome fight, however, Ho Qing chose the quickest alternative, which is using his strongest technique to put an end to it. He didn't want to hear what his copy wanted to say, didn't want to understand him or reach a common ground. He never regretted his decision, even if it was wrong. He had forsaken his sect, friends, and family, and that's because he knew that Arthur is not someone they could provoke and getaway.

What he wanted to keep wasn't his useless pride but his life. His goal was to become strong, infinitely strong, everything else did not matter and should not matter. Unlike the Patriarch or the elders, who sat in their caves and meditated, he wanted to explore the Cloud Sea Universe, uncover mysteries and achieve the peak of cultivation. Yes, he had been arrogant in the past, which, consequently, made him lose an arm, nonetheless, he swallowed back his anger, took his closest friends, and left.

"How could I not?"

The youth muttered, his eyes gazing at the scattering black ash, which was all that was left of the furious copy.

A few seconds later, Ho Qing found himself standing at the forest again, however, the mist wasn't blocking his view. He turned around and soon found out that he was automatically transported to the end of the forest, therefore completing the trial.

"Congratulations, you're the first to arrive."

Gutcha picked his nose and took out a large and disgusting booger, but what's worse is that he patted Ho Qing's shoulder with the same hand.

The youth frowned but did not comment, his eyes resting on the misty forest, hoping that the rest of the team succeeds.

...

"That's unexpected." Said Isadore while sucking a deep breath.

Out of all the participants, Ho Qing was the first to arrive at the end, and in such a short amount of time.

"Not for me." Calmly said Lucy, a rarely seen faint smile displayed on her face.

Ever since she personally trained the youth and pushed him to the brink, she knew that he was the most special out of the whole team. He discarded his pride and sought naught but power and power alone, which is precisely why he managed to acquire the unique Phoenix Fire.

"He's kind of handsome." Surprisingly, Fariya, who stood a few paces behind the couple, opened her mouth for the first time. Her eyes momentarily shone as they focused on the red-haired youth. Unfortunately for her, she couldn't say anything else as Lucy gave her a cold side-way glance.

"I thought fighting one's demon is supposed to be hard." Said Edward, visibly perplexed.

"Not for everyone. Some have it easier than others. Of course, it could be easy but still be done relatively fast." Explained Arthur. He chuckled and nodded his head, proud that one of his team was the first to complete the trial.

"You think I could do it too?" Cristina leaned closer to Lucy and whispered with a barely audible voice.

In response, the silver-haired woman nodded her head once but did not speak.

Ten minutes after Ho Qing, John and one of the youngsters from the Imoogi Team appeared at the same time. The two looked at each other then focused their gaze on Ho Qing, who also looked back but only for a second.

"Hey you." John, the young man from the Ancient Federation, approached Ho Qing.

"..."

Although he got no response, he still asked.

"Do you want to join the Federation? We'll welcome you wi-" Please visit freewebnovel.com

Before he could finish, someone pulled him a few steps backward. The youth was startled as a hideous grinning face appeared before his eyes.

"It's prohibited to recruit members from the other team."

Gutcha snickered and fixed John's slightly disheveled clothes.

"You've misunderstood me, venerable host. I didn't want to recruit him now but-"

Yet again, he was cut-off by the Pigolo.

"I understood and understand what you meant to say. Either way, you can't do it. Before asking the disciples, ask their master first."

John was irritated but didn't flare up, he coldly stared at the pigolo, nodded then respectfully bowed, then backed away.

Chapter 720 -: The Golden Room

"I'm curious about something." Said Edward, turning his head toward the Succubus, who, instead of wearing the usual overly-revealing clothes, was wearing the MoonStar robe that's worn by the Inner Disciples. The robe was half black and half silver, certainly not pretty but it's definitely unique. There was a huge symbol of a Moon and a Star on the back, and thin lines at the front, beginning from the abdomen and stopping at the right shoulder.

"..."

Fariya did not reply, she was quietly watching the unfolding fourth Trial with interest and fascination. Although she's much stronger than those participants, she felt the urge to undergo those wondrous trials and see if she how she fares.

"Succubus Fariya, hello! I'm talking to you."

"I heard you, criminal. I don't want to talk to you."

"Hey, that's unnecessarily rude. I'm no longer a criminal, errr, let's say I'm an innocent fugitive as well as a commander of a sect army. You may be strong but, technically, my status is higher than you, a slave."

"What's you say?"

The woman glared at him but did not apply any pressure, not wanting to cause trouble and get punished by Lucy, whom she now fears.

Fariya is as strong as an Exalted God yet against Lucy, even without trying, she knew she could do nothing. The disparity in strength is just too big, rendering the succubus unable to do nothing but bow her head respectfully and act docile, which is against her instinctual nature.

"As I said, I'm curious. Will you indulge me with an honest answer?" Please visit freewebnovel.com

Fariya snorted and didn't reply, no longer paying any attention to the mortal.

"The way I see it, in that prison, you were living in luxury. There was no reason for you to leave, was there?"

"..."

"You're obviously strong. A demon succubus, capable of stealing the hearts of Gods and Devils alike. Was becoming a slave a better option? I simply can't fathom it."

He paused for a couple of breaths, scrutinising the woman and grunting.

"Mahap you were bored? But that's still enough to enslave yourself. Or was it love at first sight? I can't see that happening too. Whether it's on Earth or here, humans or demons, they all think the same."

"Shut up and let me watch." She retorted, keeping her voice down and vainly taking a step forward to get away from him.

Edward followed after her while sneaking a glance at the sitting Lucy.

...

The place was luminous, too luminous, in fact. Every corner, every wall, even every speck of dust, looked as if it was made of Gold. The place wasn't big, the ceiling was five to six meters above the youth's head... pipes and strange objects were lined and intersected under his feet, covering almost the entirety of the room's floor. The four walls were not that different either.

The bright light illuminating the room originated from strange-looking light bulbs, big and linked to countless wires, also golden in color.

This room, the intense smell of steam, the loud rumbling of the pumps coming from below his feet, the unpleasantly bright golden color of the place and everything in it, the rotating tree-sized sphere hanging in the air, were all but unfamiliar to the youth.

The young man stood there, silent and calm, gripping a single-handed sword and breathing soundlessly, his expression the epitome of serenity. This was none other than Ardor, one of the members of the MoonStar team, also teleported to a place inside of his consciousness, which as of yet unbeknownst to him.

Ardor, who's the only one of the MoonStar Team who didn't come from a sect, a clan, or organization. He was a lone wandering cultivator, 38 of age and a genius amongst genius, someone who reached the level of Sword Master at the age of 35.

In terms of appearance, Ardor was average, the only striking thing about him was his unusually short height. The youth - who would be considered a fully-grown a.d.u.l.t in mortal realms and planets- was no taller than 170 centimeters. He had brown eyes, slightly long raven-black hair, thin eyebrows, pointy nose, pale lips, and a cleanly-shaved beard and mustache.

The very moment Ardor appeared in this place, he knew it was an illusion. Apart from him, only one person stepped into this place, and that person, who was his teacher, had sacrificed his life to save him, unfortunately.

A long time passed, the young man was motionless, gripping his sword and looking ahead, seemingly absent-minded. The loud rumbling of the underground pumps came to an abrupt halt, instantly followed by the appearance of golden figures rising from below with the help of some sort of a circulated elevator.

The golden figures, three in total, immediately rushed at the youth, who counterattacked before they even reached him. He swung his arm, shooting a condensed burst of translucent white sword essence, which accurately hit one of the incoming attackers.

The assailants looked like automated machines, made from the same materials as this mysterious room. They wore heavy golden armors, wielded a long double-edged sword and a large shield.

The one hit by the sword essence raised its shield and successfully blocked the attack but he was pushed to the back, staggering a few steps. The other two, however, never stopped their charge, one swinging its sword at Ardor and the other waving his shield vertically, planning to bash the target's head.

Ardor took a step forward and spun, evading both the shield and the sword. His marvelous evasive movement allowed him to appear behind their back and unleash a lightning-fast thrust. This time, however, his attack was able to hit and destroy one of the automata.

Even after finishing one, Ardor had time to unleash another attack, slashing his sword diagonally, another burst of milky sword essence came forth and sliced the back of the golden heavy armor but it was not enough to incapacitate the machine.

The other machine, the one which was initially attacked, jumped in the air and banged its sword on its shield, sending an invisible blast wave.

Like a cannonball, Ardor was sent flying away, crashing into the pipe-filled wall and then falling on the ground. The youth puked some blood but nonetheless hastily stood up, still tightly gripping his weapon, which is something he should never - under no circumstances- lose or let go of.

He groaned in pain, having difficulty breathing and feeling that his hand and the sword it was holding became much heavier.

Ardor persisted, standing straight and brandishing his sword, clashing with one of the machines. He managed to overpower it by parrying and accurately striking a gap between its armor, momentarily immobilizing it. He kicked the ground, leaping into the air and slashing the air, shooting wide milky arcs at the defenseless machine, finishing off, at last.

With only one enemy remaining, Ardor kept his distance, his back against the wall as he circulated his Nether Energy.