

Reincarnated With The Strongest System

Chapter 41: Let's Cross That Bridge When We Get There

"T-This!" Cedric stuttered as he gazed at the thousands of Dire Wolves that had been piled up outside the city of Lont. "J-Just how did Lont survive the Beast Tide?"

Leah, who was seated beside her brother, looked at this scene with an expression of disbelief. Her eyes widened in shock when she saw the corpses of the Centennial and Millennial Beasts that were only a stone's throw away from the town's entrance.

"Will, who was the one who defeated the Thousand Men Beast?" Leah asked.

William patted his chest and gave Leah a dazzling smile. "The one who killed it was me."

Leah and Cedric: ...

William chuckled as he looked at the two who had an "Are you messing with us?" look on their faces.

"Are you really the one who killed it?" Cedric asked. Clearly, he didn't believe that William was the one who managed to kill it. "Do you know what that is? That's a Millennial Beast. It's a moving one-man-army. How can a little kid like you kill it?"

"I know that it's hard to believe, but it's true," William answered. "If you doubt me, you can ask the adults in the village."

"How did you kill it?" Leah inquired. She had known William for a few years. Although William liked to boast, Leah knew that the boy was someone who was not fond of lying.

Cedric glanced at his sister before shifting his gaze to William. The siblings were really curious about how William managed to do the impossible.

"Well, Grandpa and the others had weakened it considerably. I was just the one who gave it the final blow," William explained. In the end, he decided to downplay the battle against the Millennial Beast. This way, Cedric and Leah would be able to accept his explanation.

"I see." Cedric nodded his head in understanding. His father, Sebas, would often say that James was a very strong person. As to how strong he was, Cedric had no idea. Even so, he readily accepted this explanation.

Leah gave William an appraising look. Although William said that he only gave the finishing blow to the monster, Leah felt that there was a deeper meaning to his story.

William casually flipped his hair as he gave Leah a confident smile. "Big Sister, I know I am handsome. However, if you keep looking at me like that, even someone as thick-skinned as me will feel embarrassed."

"It seems that your narcissistic nature had only grown worse since the last time I saw you." Leah gave William a sweet smile.

"Thank you for your praise."

"I am not praising you."

The two children bickered for a while as they made their way towards the Ainsworth residence. Cedric, on the other hand, shook his head helplessly. He put the matter of William slaying the Thousand-Men Beast aside and prepared himself to meet with the overseers of Lont.

The other survivors were led by Helen to the Town Hall which would serve as their temporary place of residence. Beds and other necessities were already prepared including food and water. As for clothes, the townspeople of Lont had donated their second hand clothes for them to wear.

Although they still felt sad about what happened to Fushia, the survivors were touched by Lont's hospitality.

After ensuring that their people were well cared for, Cedric and Leah followed William towards the Ainsworth residence.

When they arrived at the estate, they saw three people waiting for them at the entrance. James, Mordred, and Anna were there to welcome their guests.

"Cedric, Leah, welcome to Lont," James greeted the two children with a smile. "I'm very sorry for what happened to Sebas and Fushia."

"Lord Ainsworth, thank you for taking us in," Leah replied with a smile. "I hope that we will not be an inconvenience to you and your family."

"Nonsense." James patted Leah's head. "In my eyes, you and Cedric are my niece and nephew. The two of you are family. Call me Grandpa like you always do. Lord Ainsworth is too stiff for my taste."

"Thank you, Grandpa."

"That's better."

"Thank you, Uncle," Cedric said with a smile. "I hope that the two of us can have a proper talk about the situation in Fushia."

Leah sighed as he gave her brother an admonishing look. Sometimes, she really hated her brother's stubborn and straightforward attitude.

"Grandpa, please forgive my Big Brother for being too straightforward." Leah bowed her head in apology. "He meant no harm."

James glanced at Cedric and nodded his head. He didn't mind Cedric's attitude. He had watched the boy grow up to be a young man. Although Cedric may not be as smart as his little sister, Leah, he was someone who had an honest character.

James didn't dislike these kinds of people. It was easier to deal with them than the old schemers in the capital of the kingdom.

"It's fine." James patted Cedric's and Leah's shoulder. "The three of us will have a proper talk tomorrow. For now, let's have an early dinner so that both of you can rest."

The siblings thanked James and followed him inside the house. Anna immediately dragged Leah away, so that the young girl could take a bath. Her face and clothes were covered in dust and it made Anna's heart ache.

Cedric, too, was taken by Mordred to their guest room so that he could also wash the dirt from his body.

While the two guests were away, James asked William to tell him the things he saw in Fushia.

"Everything was in ruins." William sighed. "It was as if a hurricane passed through Fushia and destroyed everything in its way. Even the houses that were made of brick didn't escape the Beast Tide's rampage."

James nodded. He had already anticipated this outcome. His plans to rebuild Fushia and Xynnar was a huge undertaking, and he would need to lay the proper groundwork to make it happen.

"William, there is also something that I need to tell you."

"Yes, Grandpa?"

"We currently have guests," James said as he rubbed his grandson's head with his hand. "It is best to pick the right place and time when you activate the Ring of Conquest."

William's body stiffened when he heard his Grandpa's words. He raised his head and saw his Grandpa's amused face. The old man had the "I know what you did Last Summer" smirk plastered on his face.

It wasn't hard for William to connect the dots. Since the ring belonged to his father, it was only natural for his Grandpa to know of its secret.

The young boy lightly coughed and nodded his head in understanding. He was about to go to the goat pen when James gave him another reminder.

"Safety should always be your priority," James advised. "Be aware of your surroundings and retreat when necessary. Life is precious. Do you understand, Will?"

"Yes, Grandpa," William replied. He looked at the old man with a serious expression. "I will be careful."

"Good. Don't go dying on me anytime soon. I'm still expecting to hold my great grandkids in a few years."

"L-let's cross that bridge when we get there, Gramps."

Although William liked to be narcissistic with his looks, he still had a realistic approach when it came to relationships. Like all healthy young men, he was very interested in the opposite gender.

Unfortunately, William had no experience when it came to romance aside from those short few hours with Belle. He hoped that in this world, he would be able to find a girl that would make his heart beat wildly inside his chest.

Chapter 42: A Father's Love

The Ainsworth family along with their guests gathered for an early dinner. Although the dishes that were laid out on the table weren't extravagant, all of them were delicious. When dinner ended, James, Cedric, and Leah went to the living room to relax.

William excused himself and went out to take a stroll with his Mama Ella. Mordred also left the house to check on the survivors from Fushia. He wanted to know if they were in need of other necessities aside from the current supplies that they had provided for them.

Seeing that her "Grandpa" James was in a good mood, Leah decided to ask the question that had been bothering her ever since she arrived at Lont.

"Grandpa, William said that he was the one who landed the killing blow on the Millennial Beast. Is that true?" Leah asked.

Cedric who was seated beside her perked his ears in attention. Although he accepted William's reasoning, he wanted to know how the little boy managed to do it.

"Yes," James replied with a smile. "The little bastard almost gave me a heart attack. However, if not for him then Lont might have also ended up in ruins."

James grinned as he reminisced William's courageous charge on the battlefield. It was something that made a lasting impression on him.

"Uncle, What kind of Millennial Beast was it?" Cedric asked. His father, Sebas, had taught him a lot when it came to identifying the monsters that belonged to the Forbidden Lands.

"It was a Strathmore Thunder Horned Wolf," James answered. "That critter is a pain in the bum. One mistake and everything will go boom."

"Strathmore Thunder Horned Wolf...," Cedric muttered. "Wait! Thunder Horned Wolf? THAT Thunder Horned Wolf? The one that can use Storm Annihilation?"

"Yes." James nodded. "That pesky and annoying wolf that only knows how to bring others with it to the afterlife. The bastard is a scummy vermin I tell you. If not for Will, we would have been grievously injured from the explosion."

"Grandpa, could it be..." Leah looked at James with disbelief. "When William said that he landed the last blow, do you mean it was during the time when the Thunder Horned Wolf was about to unleash its suicide attack?"

"Yes." James grinned. "The boy got lucky and managed to hit the wolf where it hurts. He was able to cancel the suicide attack. This gave Ella the opportunity to deliver the Death Blow which ended the bastard's life."

"Ella?" Leah's eyes widened in shock. "Will's Mama Ella? She gave the Death Blow to the Millennial Beast?"

"Unbelievable right?" James chuckled. "Frankly, if I wasn't there to witness the scene, I wouldn't have believed it either. It was simply a miracle."

The siblings exchanged a glance at each other. It never crossed their mind that the narcissistic boy whom they had known for a few years was capable of such a feat.

He was about to say more when he felt a familiar presence just outside the house. James didn't feel any hostility coming from that presence. Instead, he felt a sense of familiarity.

The "guest" lingered for a time before disappearing completely.

"Grandpa? Is there something wrong?" Leah saw the sudden change in James' expression and wondered if their questions had somehow offended this kind old man.

"No," James replied with a smile. "I'll go out to patrol the town for a bit. The two of you can do anything you want for the time being. Please, make yourselves feel at home."

James casually walked towards the Eastern side of Lont while humming a tune. The full moon and the countless stars in the heavens illuminated the path in front of him. Soon, he arrived at a grove of trees.

A man wearing a traveler's cloak was leaning against a tree with his arms crossed over his chest. He had a sturdy build and his aura was that of an expert fighter.

"Aren't you going to see them?" James asked. "They are very worried about you, you know?"

"Maybe I'll meet up with my daughter," the man answered. "As for my son, he needs to stand on his own two feet and see the world for what it really is. I have pampered him long enough."

Sebas, Cedric's and Leah's father, stepped out of the grove and faced James with a determined expression.

"What are your plans?" James raised an eyebrow. "Do you want me to help your son rebuild Fushia?"

"Lord Ainsworth, I leave my children in your hands," Sebas bowed his head. "I plan to visit some of my old friends and see if they are still alive and well. As for the rebuilding of Fushia, you can talk to my children about it."

"Sometimes, I wish that Leah was a boy. She has a good head on her shoulders and she's talented in magic as well. Although Cedric isn't a bad candidate... he is just far too naive."

"You spoiled him too much," James commented. "Flowers raised in a greenhouse are beautiful, but they will not survive in the wild."

Sebas nodded his head and thought for a while. "Lord Ainsworth, if possible, please, enroll my son in an academy in the central continent. Maybe, that environment will become beneficial for his growth."

James nodded his head after careful considerations. He had the same opinion as Sebas. Although Cedric was already twenty years old, he still needed to learn the ways of the world. Both men were worried that he would be taken advantage of by nobles if he remained the same.

"That can be arranged, but how about Leah?" James asked.

"Leah can also be considered a young genius," Sebas replied with pride. "It would be best if she were to enroll at the Hellan Royal Academy in the capital. I believe that little Matthew is currently studying there, isn't that right, Lord Ainsworth?"

"Indeed. My grandson is currently studying at the Royal Academy."

"Then it's settled. I'm sure that Matthew will look after Leah."

"Oh? So you knew?" The corner of James' lips curled up into a smirk.

"How could I possibly not know?" Sebas helplessly shook his head.

"Whenever Matthew is in Lont, that good daughter of mine would sneak out of the house to meet him. To this day, I still don't know what that little girl sees in your grandson."

James laughed as he patted Sebas's shoulder. Clearly, he was also very impressed on how Matthew managed to win the affection of the genius girl from Fushia.

"It's because Matthew inherited my charisma," James bragged. "I'm sure that Leah saw that he has a lot of potential, so she decided to call dibs on him. Your daughter has good eyes for men."

Sebas simply nodded his head. He had already accepted that his daughter was smitten with Matthew. The Ainswoth family had a good lineage, so Sebas didn't have a problem with their union.

His only concern was whether their feelings would stay the same as they grew older. For him, it didn't matter who Leah married in the end. As long as she was happy, Sebas would give her his blessings.

Chapter 43: Return To The Goblin Crypt

Leah knelt beside her bed as she prayed to the Goddess Euna. She was the Goddess of Rivers and Lakes, and her deceased mother was one of her firm believers.

Right after she finished her prayer, she heard a knock coming from the door of her room.

'It must be Big Brother checking up on me,' Leah thought as she hurried to open the door.

However, the one standing outside her room wasn't her brother, but James, the Overseer of Lont.

"Sorry, did I disturb you?" James asked.

"No, Grandpa," Leah replied. "I just finished my prayer."

James smiled and nodded his head. He then gave Leah a letter and bid her goodnight. Leah watched her "Grandpa" disappear in the hallway before closing the door of her room. She looked at the letter in her hands with curiosity.

Leah knew that James wouldn't do unnecessary things. If he wanted to talk to her, there was no need to use a letter as a medium. Since that was the case then where did this letter come from?

'I guess I have no other choice but to read it.' Leah sighed and started reading the letter in her hand.

Five minutes later...

Leah left her room with hurried footsteps. Her heart was thumping wildly inside her chest. If possible, she wanted to run towards the door, but she didn't want to cause a commotion inside the house.

The moment she left the main entrance, her calm demeanor broke down. Leah no longer cared about etiquette as she ran with all her might towards the Eastern Side of Lont. Her white robe fluttered in the night, not caring if it got dirty or not.

Her lungs were already screaming at her and the stinging pain in her chest made her aware that she was pushing herself to the limits. However, she didn't care.

There was only one thing in her mind. She had to see him. The man whom she and her brother thought had died during the Beast Tide.

Under the moonlight, the beautiful girl with midnight-blue hair arrived at the grove. She leaned against a tree, panting for breath as she endured the pain in her chest.

"Silly girl. Why do you need to push yourself like this?" Sebas asked. "I'm not going anywhere."

"Dad!" Leah cried out and jumped into her father's arms.

Feeling the strong and protective embrace wrapped around her, Leah's final defenses broke down. She cried, and cried, and cried, until Sebas could no longer endure and teared up as well.

There were so many words that they wanted to say, but all of them disappeared the moment they held each other. For now, those questions would have to wait. The reunion of father and daughter had started in this manner.

William locked the main entrance of the goat open and closed all of its windows. His grandfather had reminded him that he should be more aware of his surroundings when using the Ring of Conquest.

The goats lined up in order as their eyes looked excitedly at William. They had been waiting for this moment and all of them were raring to explore and train inside the Goblin Crypt.

"Is everyone ready?" William asked with a smile.

""Meeeeeeeh!""

"What is our main priority?"

""Meeeeeeeh!""

"That's right." William nodded his head. "Safety is our main priority. All of you are not allowed to leave your team and wander alone inside the dungeon. Troublemakers will be punished! You will be banned from entering the dungeon for a day. Do I make myself clear?"

""Meeeeeeeh!""

William smiled and mounted his Mama Ella. He then clenched his fist and activated the ring in his finger. "Open, Ring of Conquest!"

A white light enveloped everyone inside the goat pen and transported them inside the dungeon. William's understanding on how to control the Ring of Conquest had made it possible for him to choose which floor to appear on.

He didn't hesitate and chose the Twelfth Floor of the Goblin Crypt.

The two Team Leaders, Aslan and Chronos, stepped forward and their party members lined up behind them.

William and Ella were at the front, while the two teams flanked his sides. The difference between the Eleventh Floor and the Twelfth Floor was the number of Hobgoblins in a party.

Two Warrior Hobgoblins and One Hobgoblin Archer were the most common party composition on their current floor. Sometimes, there were exceptions where there were two archers and only one warrior in the party.

Even so, it didn't make much difference against the small herd of goats who were looking at them, not as monsters, but as experience points. The tactics of the Angorian goats were very simple.

They first used Quick Attack in order to get close to their targets. Next, they use Horn Attack to inflict greater damage. The arrows fired by the archers were immediately blocked by William's Ice Bullet.

The battle would immediately become a one-sided beating as soon as the goats arrived in close combat range. Seven hours later, the group managed to clear the Twelfth floor with ease.

William ordered them to rest for an hour before they continued their exploration. The Thirteenth Floor was a bit trickier because there were four Hobgoblins in each party.

In order to overcome this formation, Aslan and Chronos decided to split their team. William only gave them a suggestion and the two leaders acted on it with determined expressions.

Three goats per Hobgoblin. That was the new battle plan that they had devised. The battle took longer, but the results were satisfactory.

After two days, William and the rest cleared the Thirteenth Floor, and descended to the Fourteenth.

The goats had gained a level and all of them were currently Level 20.

Ella, on the other hand, was now Level 10.

After careful considerations, William decided to allocate her skill points on two offensive skills that matched her rank.

< Wild Charge 10 / 10 >

(30 Mana Points)

-- Enshrouds self with inner strength and charge towards the target with wild abandon.

-- Damage dealt is equivalent to Strength Stat x 10

-- Deals 2x Damage to Beast Type Monsters

-- Has a chance to stun the enemy.

This was the more powerful version of Horn Attack. It was a skill that was meant to destroy everything in its path.

The next skill that William chose was Mega Kick.

< Mega Kick 8 / 10 >

(30 Mana Points)

-- Delivers a powerful kick that can shatter boulders with ease.

-- Damage dealt is equivalent to Strength x 8

-- Deals 3x Damage to non-living creatures, objects, or constructs

If Wild Charge was a skill that was meant to take the life of living things. Mega Kick was meant to destroy non-living things.

According to the system, there were several creatures in the world like the Undead, and Golems, that were very hard to kill using normal means. This was why William chose to add Mega Kick so that Ella would have a means to handle any kind of situation.

Although the skill wasn't currently at its Max Level, its damage was still powerful enough to blow away everything that stood in their way.

In truth, William wanted to call it a day, but the goats were still raring to go. Will and Ella were in a predicament. Both of them thought that it was time to go, but they were also curious about what was in store for them on the Fourteenth Floor.

Chapter 44: William's Fall

In the end, William relented and led the way. After walking for a few minutes, the boy spotted a group of Hobgoblins who were also looking in their direction.

William frowned when he noticed a new monster among their ranks. He immediately used his Appraisal Skill to see its information

< Hobgoblin Shaman >

-- Goblins with the affinity to wield magic and have evolved to become a Hobgoblin Shaman.

-- Specializes in the use of Dark and Elemental Magic.

-- This monster is stronger than the Hobgoblin Leader by One Rank

William's expression immediately became serious. 'One Rank higher than the Hobgoblin Leader?'

The Hobgoblin Leader was the Boss of the Tenth Floor. Although Ella was able to fight it one on one, it was still a boss monster.

The young shepherd knew that the Hobgoblin Shaman was a threat at the Boss Monster Level. However, he reasoned out that his Mama Ella was also very strong right now. After a brief internal struggle, William decided to give it a try.

He dismounted Ella and stood at the rear.

"Mama Ella, I'll leave the Hobgoblin Shaman to you," William stated.

"Meeeeeh!"

"Aslan, Chronos, we are going to use the same strategy!"

""Meeeeeeeh!""

William held the staff in his hands firmly and used Bestow and Ice Armor on everyone, including himself.

(A/N: Bestow doesn't work on William. Only the Ice Armor)

"Go! Rush Attack!" William ordered.

The Goats turned into white blurs as they charged on their respective targets. The Hobgoblin Shaman was unfazed as it looked at the charging War ibex in front of it. It pointed its gnarled fingers at Ella as it chanted a spell in its mother tongue.

"Zak Ruta!"

A red beam of light shot out from its finger and hit Ella's forehead. The Angorian War Ibex immediately stopped its charge and thrashed around like a crazed bull in a rodeo competition. Ella's wild attacks accidentally hit Chronos, which sent the goat slamming towards the wall.

Wisp of red aura surrounded Ella's body and had forced her into a berserk state. She could no longer identify friend or foe and attacked the creatures near it.

Aslan commanded his team to retreat, but it was already too late. The Hobgoblins had joined the fight and waved their wooden bats at the goats mercilessly. The archers fired arrow, after arrow, which pierced the bodies of Echo, Flynn, Griffin, Hades, Io, making them scream in pain.

"Noooooooooooooooooooo!" William roared as he erected Ice Walls to separate the Hobgoblins and his herd.

"Rakas zhak tu!" The Hobgoblin Leader pointed at William and a black orb of light shot out from its fingertips.

William's vision immediately darkened as the "Blind Spell" of the Hobgoblin Shaman landed on him. He was too focused on the Hobgoblins attacking his herd that he didn't notice the Shaman casting a spell on him.

Black smoke oozed out of William's eyes. He couldn't see anything, but the darkness wasn't able to stop him from hearing the pained bleating of the goats. Clearly, they were seriously injured, perhaps even dying.

"Ring of Conquest!" William activated the ring to forcefully eject all of them out of the dungeon. Before the light enveloped William and the goats, an arrow pierced his right chest.

The darkness had increased his sensitivity and the stinging pain, made his body go into shock. The Hobgoblin wasn't being idle either. Several orbs of different colors hit William's body as the Hobgoblin Shaman fired a barrage of spells. It had recognized the boy as the highest current threat and decided to finish him off.

William's body helplessly fell on the ground and stopped moving. A few seconds later, he, and the rest of his herd, disappeared from the Goblin Crypt.

James was meditating outside the goat pen. It had become his habit to wait for his grandson's return from the dungeon every night. When he heard Ella's mad bleating inside the goat shed, he realized that something was terribly wrong.

The old man punched the locked door and made his way inside the shed. The scent of blood reached his nose and it made him anxious. There, in the corner, William laid on the ground with an arrow sticking out of his chest.

Ella was bleating and nudging the young boy's head in an attempt to wake him up. The effect of the Berserk Spell had worn off at the same time that they were ejected from the dungeon. When she saw William's current state, Ella panicked and immediately called out for help.

She knew that James was outside the shed and only he could help William in his time of need.

Black wisps of smoke were coming out from William's eyes and it made James' chest tighten. He was very familiar with this spell because he had experienced it first hand on the battlefield.

The rest of the goats were lying on the ground. Their white coats were stained in blood and several deep gashes showed the bones in their bodies. The corner of their lips were bleeding, and some of them were in near death conditions.

"William!" James roared as he rushed towards his fallen grandson. He checked his condition and was about to take him to Owen when the boy opened his eyes.

"G-Grandpa," William said through gritted teeth. "H-How is everyone? The goats, how are they?"

"They are fine," James lied. "Does it hurt? Don't worry. I'll take you to Owen. He will fix you up in a jiffy."

"N-No." William resisted. "I n-need to save them first. Or else, they will die. I-I can't allow them to die. It was my fault. My fault."

Williams' tears streaked down the side of his face. His vision was covered in darkness, and needed someone to guide him to help him attend to his herd. He was hurting, but the pain of losing his goats was more painful.

"P-Please, Grandpa. L-Let me treat them."

"Okay."

James had no choice but to agree to William's pleading. He carried him in his arms and approached the goat whom William had named as Chronos.

'S-System, h-help me.'

< How may I help you? >

'M-Mass, F-First Aid.'

< Understood. >

< Creating Special Skill...>

< Host has learned skill: Mass First Aid >

William didn't have time to heal the goats one by one. He knew that time was running out and he could only beg the system to help him. Fortunately, the system accommodated his request and created the skill he required.

< Mass First Aid >

(250 Mana Points)

-- Heals twenty hit points of every member of the herd.

-- Only work for creatures that belong to the herd.

-- This skill cannot be upgraded.

James guided his grandson's hand and placed it over Chronos' head. The boy didn't waste any more time and used the skill "Mass First Aid" repeatedly. The entire shed was covered with a gentle green light. William kept using the skill until he had exhausted all of his mana reserves.

After the last dregs of magic power left his body, William finally lost consciousness.

James bolted out of the shed as soon as he saw that his grandson fainted. He made a beeline towards the only Life Magus in Lont. Ella was hot on his tail as she sprinted behind the old man. She was still in her War Ibex Form which allowed her to keep up with James' fast movement.

"Owen! Help!" James kicked the door of Owen's house without caring whether the other person would get angry or not. The wooden door broke sending wood pieces flying in every direction.

"You bastard! What do you think you're doing?!" Owen roared as he angrily ran down the staircase.

He was sleeping peacefully with his wife a few seconds ago when he heard the loud crashing sound of their front door being torn apart. The first thing he saw was James carrying William in his arms.

There was an arrow sticking out of the boy's chest and black wisps of smoke were rising from his closed eyes.

Owen's angry expression immediately became grim as he understood the situation.

"Lie him down," Owen ordered. "Don't say anything until I've finished curing him, do you understand?"

"Yes."

"I just said that you're not allowed to say anything!"

James wanted to slap the old man for being unreasonable, but knew that now was not the time to have an argument. William's safety was his priority, so he kept his lips shut and watched as Owen used his Life Magic on his grandson.

Owen firmly held the arrow that was sticking out of the boy's chest and pulled it out in one attempt. He immediately applied healing magic to close the wound. After that, he used a Diagnostic Spell to give William's body a full scan.

"Darkness Magic, Blind, Poison, and Corrosion!" Owen hissed. "Damn! Just who is this Dark Magician who dares to bully a little kid? Does he have no shame?!"

Owen was perplexed. These kinds of spells were not something that a simple mage could do. Only Dark Magicians on the Fourth Circle were capable of wielding this degree of Dark Magic.

Although there was a Dark Sorcerer in Lont, that person would never harm anyone in town. Owen knew that this was the work of someone outside their circle of friends.

For the time being, he pushed these thoughts to the back of his mind, and busied himself in dispelling the curses in William's body.

Chapter 45: The Old Ginger Is Still Spicy

"How is he?" James inquired after Owen finished treating William's injuries.

"Calm your tits old man." Owen snorted. "Your grandson is fine. Now, tell me, how did this happen? Are we under attack? Did the nobles make their move?"

"No." James firmly shook his head. "We are not under attack, and this has no relation to the nobles."

"Then how?" Owen narrowed his gaze. "Celine would never harm anyone in this town! Don't tell me this is her work? Even if you kill me, I won't believe it!"

"No, this is not Celine's work." James sighed and decided to come clean. "William has inherited the Ring of Conquest. Maybe he encountered a strong monster during his exploration."

"W-What?!" Owen exclaimed. "What did you say?! H-He!"

"Shhhh!" James glared at the stuttering old fool in front of him. "Don't tell anyone. The only people who know about this are Me, You, and my son, Mordred. You understand the consequences if this matter is brought to light, don't you?"

Owen clicked his tongue. If possible, he wanted to forget that James had shared this secret with him. The Ring of Conquest was a royal heirloom that belonged to the Demon Race. If they caught wind that it was in the possession of a ten-year-old brat then the Demon King would definitely send his generals to retrieve it, no matter the cost!

"Fine. I will not tell a soul." Owen promised. "However, we need to handle this matter properly. You were too reckless. Do you think that everyone in Lont are blind and deaf? You broke into my house and raised a commotion. It is impossible to cover this up. We need to think of an excuse!"

James sighed and felt slightly regretful. His worry had overcome his common sense. He had made a scene in front of everyone and their curiosity would lead them to ask questions.

Fortunately, Owen had erected a barrier around his house to prevent anyone from spying on them. Although they trusted their comrades, they couldn't risk letting William's secret be known by everyone. The less people in the know, the better.

"Let William stay with me for the time being," Owen said after thinking things through. "Tell everyone that he has suffered Evocation Madness and needs to be monitored for a few days."

Evocation Madness was a state where a magician's magic power went out of control. This was similar to becoming berserk. The only difference was that this time, magic was involved instead of physical prowess.

"That is indeed the best solution." James nodded his head in agreement. "Everyone saw William use magic. Encountering this state is very common among those who have just awakened their powers."

The two old men discussed for another half an hour before parting ways. James also promised that he would call a carpenter to fix Owen's broken door

as soon as morning came. It took James a while to convince the worried Ella to return to the goat shed with him.

Ella was very reluctant to leave, but James managed to convince her in the end. The night's incident was wrapped up the next day and everyone accepted James' explanation.

Chronos, Aslan, and the rest of the goats were also on their way to a full recovery. Although they were still shaken by what happened to them, Ella's presence made them feel less anxious.

William woke up three days after the incident. Owen was a very powerful Life Magus and it was very easy for him to heal the young boy's injuries.

The reason why it took him three days to wake up was due to the mental exhaustion he suffered during the fight against the Hobgoblin Shaman.

"Thank you for everything, Mr. Owen," William said while bowing his head in a respectful manner.

"It's fine," Owen replied while casually waving his hand. "Are you hungry?"

"Very."

"Then eat. We will continue our talk after you finish eating."

William happily ate the chicken soup that was served to him by Owen's servant. The enticing aroma sharpened his senses and the delicious taste brought warmth to his soul. Owen watched the young boy eat with a smile on his face.

"Dear, are you here?" a soft and delicate voice of a lady sounded from outside William's room.

"I am here, sweetheart," Owen replied. "Come. It is a good time to introduce you to our guest."

"Alright, I'm coming in," the lady replied.

William raised his head to look in the direction of the door. A beautiful lady with blonde hair, and green eyes walked towards Owen with a smile. William could tell that the lady was only in her early twenties. He assumed that she was Owen's daughter.

The beautiful lady grabbed one of the other chairs that was sitting against the wall and carried it over, so she could sit beside Owen. She then sat down beside the old man and held his hand.

Owen smiled and made a gesture to introduce William. "Sarah, this is William. He is James' grandson. William, this is my wife, Sarah. I hope that the two of you get along."

"Pffft!" William spat the delicious chicken soup inside his mouth when he heard Owen's introduction. "W-Wife? She is your wife?"

"Yes," Owen answered with a smug look on his face. He didn't seem to mind that William had created a mess inside the room. This was not the first time that Owen had seen this kind of reaction. He was already used to it. In fact, he enjoyed seeing this reaction from people.

"It's true." Sarah smiled sweetly. "Owen is my husband. We have already been married for two years."

'Hisssss! This old cow hit the jackpot and managed to eat beautiful young grass,' William thought. 'The old ginger is still spicy.'

Sarah chatted with William, but she didn't stay for long. After giving Owen a kiss, she left the room and returned to doing her duties.

"Isn't my wife a beauty?" Owen asked.

"Yes," William replied with a complicated expression. "Very."

"Alright, since you have finished eating, it's time to talk about serious business," Owen said. "James has already told me that you are in the possession of the Ring of Conquest. I'm sure that he already told you that this secret should not be known to many people, right?"

"Yes."

"Good. Now this makes things easier. Tell me, what did you face to suffer such injuries? Only a powerful Dark Magician can use curses of that level."

William decided to come clean and told Owen about his battle against the Hobgoblin Shaman. He didn't hide anything and narrated the event from start to finish. The old man listened as William told his tale. Although he didn't say

anything, William could see the disapproving expression on the old man's face.

Chapter 46: Fight Fire With Fire

"And that's what happened." William sighed. "It was my fault for underestimating it."

Owen smacked William's head with the palm of his hand which made the boy yelp in pain.

"Idiot! The first rule of dungeon exploration is to never underestimate your opponents!" Owen nagged. "You do realize that if you didn't react on time and used the ring, you and your goats would have died."

"...Yes." William felt aggrieved, but it was the truth. He didn't dare to make any excuses for the mistake that he had made.

"Listen here, Little Will," Owen said with a serious expression. "There are instances where pure strength is useless. Dark Magicians are feared by many, do you know why?"

"Is it because of their curses?"

"Yes and No."

Owen grunted as he summoned a white ball of light in his hand. "The reason why Dark Magicians are feared is because they can kill people without their victim knowing how they died. Their curses can penetrate that person's body and... destroy it from within."

A black speck appeared in the middle of the ball of white light in Owen's hand. It then gradually became bigger until it encompassed all the light in the ball turning it into a black orb of malice.

"This process can take years, but one thing is for sure," Owen stated. "Once a Dark Magician decides to kill a person, it will be very hard for anyone to survive. Fortunately, the Hobgoblin Shaman you fought is only at the Fourth Circle. The spells can be dispelled by someone of my rank."

However, if you were cursed by someone that equaled or surpassed mine then nothing in this world could save you. I guarantee that you would suffer a very slow and painful death. This is why people don't like to associate themselves with Dark Magicians."

William listened to Owen's explanation and frowned. He then looked at the old man with a serious expression and asked a question that he had been meaning to ask since the old man started to talk about Dark Magic.

"Then, Mr. Owen, how can I fight against it?" William asked.

"Well, there are many ways to fight against Dark magic. The first thing you have to do is, kill the Hobgoblin Shaman before it kills you," Owen answered. "I just find it strange for a ten-year-old like you to ask me how to fight a Hobgoblin Shaman. Do you know? Even Silver Ranked Adventurers can die when facing those critters!"

The old man's voice was filled with contempt as he looked at the young boy in front of him. Even so, William's gaze never wavered. He continued to look at Owen with a serious expression which made the old man raise his eyebrow.

"You're seriously trying to find a way to fight a Hobgoblin Shaman at your age?" Owen asked. "Why? Are you trying to meet a deadline or something?"

"No." William shook his head. "I just want to become stronger. The fight against the Millennial Beast made me realize that I am just an ant that can easily die once a being of that level decided to step on me."

"Mmm, well, you're not wrong." Owen had to admit that the boy's logic held some truth in it. After pondering for a short time, Owen decided to give the boy some advice in order to overcome his current predicament.

"There are three ways that you can overcome your current situation. Like I said, the first one is to kill the Goblin Shaman before it kills you. This means that you have to use a long range spell or an attack that can kill it at a safe distance.

The second way is to learn Light or Life Magic. Although both magics have the same roots, they still have different purposes. Light Magic is widely used by Clerics, Priests, and Paladins. You can even say that they are the nemesis of Dark magic."

Owen paused for a moment to allow William to digest his explanation. He understood that this might be hard for a ten-year-old to understand, but since the boy was serious, he decided to get serious as well.

"Then the last way to beat Dark magic is to... fight it with Dark Magic." Owen grinned. "Do you know of that saying? An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, and fight fire with fire? Once you master Dark Magic, there will be very few 'status spells' that can cause harm to you.

So, Little Will, what do you plan to do? Ah, let me just say this in advance. If you are to learn Dark Magic, people will avoid you like a plague. Although Dark Magic isn't necessarily evil, those who wield it are treated as such."

William lowered his head as he sank into deep thoughts. He weighed the pros and cons of Owen's suggestions. After thinking for ten minutes, William raised his head and said his answer.

"Mr. Owen, I'd like to learn... "

"Meeeeeeh!"

"Meeeeeeh!"

"Meeeeeeh!"

"Meeeeeeh!"

After talking with Owen, William returned to the Ainsworth Residence. After seeing his Grandfather, Uncle, and Aunt, he went straight to the goat pen to check on his herd. He was immediately surrounded by Aslan, Chronos, and the rest of the goats.

William crouched on the ground and gave everyone a hug. The goats surrounded him and pressed their foreheads against his body. The young boy felt their love and concern and it made him feel warm.

Ella looked at this scene with a calm expression. She wanted to step forward and lean her head on William's shoulder, but she held it back. William's second mother understood that her "son" needed to give the goats some sense of comfort in order to calm the anxiety that had kept them stretched to their limits these past few days.

After a while, the goats were finally sated and regained their lively demeanor.

"Mama." William stood and opened his arms wide.

Ella walked forward and licked the boy's face. William giggled because his Mama's tongue felt very ticklish. He hugged her neck and brushed the top of her head. This was their way to assure each other that everything was fine.

The Ainsworth family, along with Leah and Cedric, had lunch together. The two siblings were relieved to know that William had recovered from "Evocation Madness". William had been told in advance that this was the explanation that Owen and James had given their comrades, so he had to stick to this explanation.

During lunch, William noticed that Leah seemed livelier compared to that last time he had seen her. She was even smiling and the boy could tell that she was not faking it.

"Did something good happen, Big Sister?" William asked. "You look more beautiful than the last time I saw you."

"Really?" Leah gave William a very sweet smile. A smile that was sweet enough to rot his teeth.

"Yes." William nodded his head. "Did something good really happen?"

"Maybe," Leah replied. She playfully stuck out her tongue, but didn't say anything else.

Cedric also noticed the change in his sister's attitude. However, he didn't say anything about it. For him, it was better for Leah to be like this instead of being depressed by their father's passing.

If he only knew that his father wasn't dead, and had even met her sister, he would probably be feeling the same as her.

Chapter 47: Your Fifteen Minutes Starts Now

The next day, Owen accompanied William and Ella to a house that was located on the Southern Outskirts of Lont. The two-storey house looked very

cozy on the outside. Several orchids hung on the front porch. The air was filled with their fragrance and William could feel that his body was feeling refreshed after inhaling their scent.

"Celine, I brought Little William with me," Owen said as he lightly knocked on the door.

"Come in, Owen," a voice that was as soft as silk replied from inside the house.

Getting the owner's permission, Owen opened the door and made a gesture for William to enter. The first thing that William saw was a room filled with the weirdest creatures that he had seen in both of his lifetimes.

An orange fruit that seemed to have grown tentacles were sunbathing by the window. A fish that had the head of a tiger was swimming inside a fish tank. Two potted plants were playing chess on top of a table, and a parrot with the head of a monkey looked at William in disdain.

"Uwaaaaak! A monkey has arrived!" the monkey parrot announced as it ridiculed William from its perch. "A stupid monkey with a stupid goat. Uwaaaaaaaak!"

"Mind your manners, Oliver. This is not the way we should treat our guests," the same silky voice reprimanded the parrot monkey which made it shut its mouth completely.

"Celine, it seems that your pet is still as disdainful as always," Owen said as he scanned the room to look for the master of the house.

"Well, Oliver wouldn't be Oliver unless he acts this way," Celine replied. "I'm on the second floor, Owen. Forgive me, but can the two of you wait for five more minutes? I'm about to finish my experiment. "

"Of course." Owen had already expected something like this to happen so he nudged William to take a seat on the couch that was near the window where the orange-tentacled-creature was currently sunbathing.

The parrot monkey made faces at William, but it didn't utter a word, lest it anger its master. William looked at this bizarre creature with interest. Aside from its weird appearance, it didn't look malicious. In fact, William felt that this creature was very intelligent and was only pretending to be stupid.

Exactly five minutes later, a beautiful lady who seemed to be in her mid-twenties walked down the staircase. She had long purple hair and wore gold-rimmed glasses. Ironically, the dress she wore was also purple-colored and it highlighted the delicate curves of her body.

William was captivated by her surreal beauty and he wasn't able to stop himself from staring at her. She was like a beautiful painting and every side of her was flawless.

"You're quite cute, but sorry, I am not interested in boys that hadn't even grown their hair," Celine gave William a mischievous wink that made the young boy's heart beat wildly inside his chest.

'D-Damn, her beauty is over 10,000.' William gulped as he stared at the beautiful lady in front of him. By far, Celine was probably the most beautiful woman that he had seen in his life. She was even more beautiful than his first love, Belle.

"William? Hey, young man, are you still with us?" Owen teased the young boy as he lightly slapped his cheeks.

"Meeeeeeeh!"

Ella's voice snapped William out of his daze. He then scratched his head in order to hide his embarrassment.

"Don't worry, no one will laugh at you." Owen patted the boy's shoulders. "If I wasn't married, I would have confessed to her long ago."

Celine snorted. "Sorry, I'm not interested in an old cow who is after young grass either. You must have saved the world in your past life to have Sarah in your life now."

"Well, I admit that my wife may not be as beautiful as you, but she's quite feisty in bed," Owen replied with a smug expression.

Celine, William, Ella, and the parrot monkey, looked at the old bastard with disdain. All of their expressions were saying only one word and that was "Scum".

Owen was unaffected by their disdainful looks. In fact, he even felt that it was the highest compliment.

Celine snorted one more time before landing her gaze on the young boy in front of her.

"William, is it? Allow me to break your bubble young man," Celine said as she fixed the glasses on her face. "You won't be able to learn Dark Magic just because you want to learn it. Only those that have the affinity for the Dark Arts will be able to wield its power."

"I understand, but please, give me a chance," William replied with determination. "If I really don't have any affinity with Dark Magic then I won't pursue the matter any further."

"Hmm, for a ten-year-old you sure have spunk." Celine nodded her head in appreciation. "Very well, let us see if you have any affinity with Dark Magic. Owen told me that you have learned Ice Magic. Is this true?"

"Yes."

"Interesting."

Celine summoned a crystal ball on her hand and motioned for William to come closer. "Place your hand over the crystal ball."

William did as he was told. A few seconds later, a snowflake appeared inside the crystal ball. Celine observed it for a few seconds before shaking her head.

"Sorry, you don't have any affinity for Dark Magic," Celine stated. "I suggest that you should just focus on your ice magic."

Owen and Celine thought that William would feel depressed because of the result. However, instead of depression, what they saw made them puzzled.

"Why are you smiling?" Celine frowned. "Didn't I just tell you that you don't have an affinity with Dark Magic?"

"Yes," William replied. "I heard you loud and clear, Ms. Celine."

"Then why?"

"It's because I don't need things like affinities to use any kind of magic."

Celine and Owen looked at the boy's smug expression. Both of them felt an itch on their hands and if not for William being a few years younger than them, they might have spanked his butt silly for saying something so audacious!

In this world, magic affinity was supreme. Even if you trained for a hundred years, you couldn't change this fact. A fire mage wouldn't be able to use water, ice, wind, and earth magic even if they spent many years practicing it.

Even if they succeeded, the most they would be able to do was use simple spells like magic bullet and the likes because of the restriction in their affinities.

There were rare cases where people were born with two affinities and, on very rare occasions, some even had three. These people were considered a drop in the bucket and the different kingdoms and empires would pay every expense to nurture these promising individuals.

However, the smug-faced-boy in front of them declared that he didn't need any kind of affinity to use any kind of magic? Owen was already grasping the walking stick in his hand very tightly and was so close to spanking William's bum.

"Boy, are you messing with me?" Celine asked. Her tone carried a dangerous vibe like a hunter that was about to lunge at its prey. "You think that learning magic is as simple as eating rice porridge?"

"Well, perhaps it is impossible for ordinary people," William replied as he answered with a confident gaze. "However, I am not someone ordinary. Ms. Celine, do you want to have a bet with me?"

"A bet?"

"Yes. In less than fifteen minutes, I will be able to learn Dark Magic."

"Hoh?" Celine narrowed her eyes and gave William a devilish smile. "Interesting. So what kind of bet are we going to have, little boy?"

"If I win, you will become my master and teach me Dark Magic," William said with a mischievous smile. "If I lose then you can make me your slave for a year. Mr. Owen here will serve as a witness."

"William... this," Owen wanted to dissuade the boy. He didn't know where William's confidence was coming from, but he understood Celine's character. She was someone who hated those who treated the learning of magic as a casual thing.

"Interesting." Celine eyed William with contempt. "Very well, I accept this bet. Owen, you will stand as our witness. I don't want to hear Old James saying that I bullied his grandson."

"Hah~ William, are you really sure about this? It's not too late to apologize, you know?" Owen sighed and tried to convince the young boy one more time. "There are things in this world that you cannot force. Learning magic is one of them."

"Don't worry, Mr. Owen," William replied. "An Ainsworth doesn't back down from their words."

Seeing that the little boy had no intention to take a step back, Owen took out a blank parchment from his storage ring and chanted. His words flew in the air and danced around the parchment making it give a white glow. After the chant ended the parchment floated between Celine and William.

"This is a contract that will bind your oaths by blood," Owen explained. "William. This is the last time I will ask. Are you sure about this?"

"Sure I'm sure," William answered with a smile.

"Hmph! If you really succeeded then I don't mind calling you Young Master from now on," Celine said in a musical voice that made the young boy feel light-headed.

Owen took a small dagger out from his storage ring and pricked William's fingertip. The drop of blood flew into the contract making it glow dark red. He did the same thing to Celine. The moment her blood melded with the contract, a dazzling light appeared and split the contract into two parts.

They turned into beams of light and penetrated William's and Celine's chests.

A monotonous voice sounded in the air and made its declaration.

[Your fifteen minutes starts now.]

Chapter 48: Don't Regret Your Decision, Little Will

"Ms. Celine, can I borrow your weapon for a while?" William asked. "I promise not to do anything to it. I just need to hold it in order to gain an affinity for Dark Magic."

"This is the first time I've heard of someone gaining an affinity by just holding a weapon, but sure, here you go." Celine summoned a grimoire and handed it to William.

Since the contract had already been established, she wouldn't be so petty as to deny the boy's needs in order to prove his claims.

Owen watched at the side with a serious expression. This was, also, the first time he had heard of someone gaining affinity by merely touching a weapon belonging to someone else. He was half in doubt and half expecting for William to show him something he had never seen before.

Grimoire of Forbidden Dreams

-- A Grimoire that once belonged to the Dark Magician who was known as the Dream Eater. Empowers its owner to have the ability to visit people's dreams and convert their dreamscape into a terminal, which the owner can enter at will.

-- Increases Intelligence stat by 100

-- Increase resistance against curses by 50%

-- Allows the usage of the skill < Dream Eater > thrice a day

< Ding! >

< Would you like to acquire the Dark Mage Job Class? >

< Yes / No >

William smiled and chose Yes. Immediately he asked the system to swap the Ice Mage Job Class for the Dark Mage Job Class.

< Congratulations! Host has acquired the Dark Mage Job Class. >

< Host has learned skill: Taint >

< Host has learned skill: Seed of Darkness >

"Thank you, Ms. Celine." William handed back the Grimoire to the beautiful lady in front of him.

"You're welcome," Celine replied as she unsummoned the book in her hand. "So, did you gain Dark Affinity by holding my book?"

Instead of answering her question, William opened his palm and chanted.

"Seed of Darkness."

A blood-red teardrop hovered in the middle of William's palm. Celine flinched, while Owen's eyes widened in shock.

Suddenly, a monotonous voice echoed inside the room.

"William Von Ainsworth has successfully fulfilled his part of the contract. May the losing party adhere to the discussed terms and fulfill their obligations."

The monotonous voice made Celine flinch for the second time. It made her realize that the boy had really succeeded and what she was seeing wasn't a parlor trick. Of course, as a Dark Sorceress of her rank, she had already felt the authenticity of the "Seed of Darkness".

She just couldn't accept that William really learned Dark Magic by simply holding her grimoire!

"T-This! Is this really possible?" Celine stuttered. "Oi, boy, is this for real?"

"Yes," William replied in a calm manner. This was also his grandpa's reaction back then so he was already expecting that Celine and Owen would act the same way he did.

"Unbelievable... simply inconceivable!" Owen gasped in shock. "You mean to say that you can learn every kind of magic there is in this world?"

William nodded his head. He didn't dare say that he could actually learn all the job professions in this world. He was afraid that it would cause Owen to have a heart attack if he heard his explanation.

"Ms. Celine, are you going to honor our bet?" William asked.

"Hah~ since I dared to bet, I dared to lose," Celine replied as she placed her hands on her hips. "You asked me to become your Master, so I will do my best to make you the most powerful Dark Mage in history. However, I will tell you now... you might regret your decision for choosing me as your master."

"I look forward to the teaching that you will impart to me starting from now on, Master." William said with a smile. He knew that his knowledge when it came to Dark Magic was very shallow and he needed someone to teach him the right way on using it.

Just like his Ice Mage Skill, although he could learn and use the skills at will, his knowledge when it came to ice magic was very shallow. Compared to those who had mastered their magic to the highest level, William was like an ice mage who could only cast ice cubes in their eyes.

If William were to meet a magician of his level, even if they use the same skills, the boy's power would be significantly weaker compared to an expert who fully understood his element.

Just like in martial arts. If two martial artists of the same practice were to fight against each other, eight out of ten battles, the stronger one would always win. This also applied to a fight between magicians of the same element.

"Let's see if you will be singing the same tune after a few days." Celine said with a sweet smile. "I'm telling you this right now William, the path of a Dark Mage isn't easy. You might come to hate me in the future. Are you still sure you want me to become your Master?"

"Of course." William nodded.

"Don't regret your decision, Little Will."

"Um... Master, you're scaring me."

"That's right. You should be scared." Celine said as a dark glint passed briefly in her eyes. "Very scared..."

William gulped when he saw that sinister glint that appeared momentarily in Celine's eyes. For some reason, he felt that something bad was going to happen to him under his new Master's tutelage.

Celine frowned as she glanced at the ring in William's finger. "It would be best if you ask Barbatos to put a special enchantment to change the appearance of that ring on your finger first. Although not all the masters of Lont can recognize the Ring of Conquest, those who do will certainly know its origins.

"I don't doubt their loyalty, but everyone has a price. If someone were to offer me something that I really wanted, I might just spill the beans and tell them that you are in possession of that ring."

William sighed as he thought about his Grandpa's words. 'Maybe it was a mistake to place the ring on my finger. Should I wear it like a necklace again?'

Although wearing it like a necklace would hide it from everyone's eyes, it wasn't a long term solution. After giving it some thought, Celine's advice was more practical.

"Thank you for your advice. Master."

"Mmm, that's more like it." Celine grinned and looked at William as if he was a frog that was about to be dissected.

The boy felt a sudden chill run down the back of his neck. He then took a few steps back and looked at Celine anxiously. Celine giggled when she saw the little brat hide behind Owen's back.

"Celine, you are up to your tricks again." Owen sighed. "Can you give William some slack?"

"Fine. Meet me after two--no three days," Celine said before heading towards the stairs. "I still have an important experiment to finish. For the time being, you find Barbatos and have your ring fixed. We'll start your lessons in three days."

"Thank you, Master," William peeked behind Owen's back. "I'll come back in three days."

"Good. Now, please, leave me. I want peace and quiet when working on my experiments." Celine had already gone up to the second floor, leaving the boy and the old man standing in the living room.

"Let's go, William."

"Un!"

"Meeeeeh."

As they left Celine's house, William felt the pressure on his shoulders decrease dramatically. Even though he wanted to raise his Shepherd Job Class to the limit, it wasn't possible at this point in time.

Of course, if he really wanted to, he could grind on the lower numbered floors of the Goblin Crypt until he reached his desired level. But, William didn't want to do that. Since he already experienced how malicious Dark Magic was first hand, he wanted to understand this power to prevent the past incident from happening again.

William admitted that fighting against the unknown was a scary experience. However, he was not alone. He has his Mama Ella, and his herd, to fight by his side.

The boy patted his Mama Ella's neck as he mounted her back. "Don't worry, Mama. We will win next time. I promise."

"Meeeeeeeeeeeeeh!"

Owen watched as the goat and the little boy took the lead and walked towards the direction of the Ainsworth Residence. His immature face and his small build were no different from any ten-year-old in Lont.

It was his eyes.

His clear green eyes always looked forward. Unwavering, uncompromising, and unyielding. The boy's eyes reminded Owen of William's father. The man who single-handedly kept the Demons from invading the Elven Continent of Silvermoon.

William's father, Maxwell Von Ainsworth, was also known as the Dungeon Conqueror. The man whom the elves had acknowledged as a Hero. He was

also the one who had won the heart of the Saintess of the World Tree, Lady Arwen.

It should have been a perfect ending, but Fate had other plans for him.

'I pray that you will not follow your father's footsteps, Little William,' Owen sighed as he thought about the future that might have been, but never came to pass. 'For your sake, and the sake of the Ainsworth Family, I hope...'

Chapter 49: Latest News From The Kingdom

William laid his head on Ella's soft, and fluffy, belly as he read the two skills he had gained from acquiring the Dark Mage Job Class.

< Taint >

(20 Mana Points)

- Disperses an Aura that weakens surrounding enemies.
- All enemies within ten-square meters around the Dark Mage have their physical and magical resistances decreased by 30%
- Increase the chances of inflicting status effects on enemies within the aura's range.
- Skill Duration: 10 Minutes.

< Seed of Darkness >

(20 Mana Points)

- Deals continuous pulsing Dark Magic at the enemy for ten seconds.
- Damage dealt is equivalent to Intelligence x 2
- Deals 6x additional damage to enemies for each status effect applied to them while Seed of Darkness is active.
- Damage can be stacked up to 5x.

'These two skills are quite good,' William thought. 'Now let's check the other skills under the Dark Mage Job Class.'

William wasn't able to keep his excitement from appearing on his face as he opened the Dark Mage Skill Tree. Earlier, he didn't have time to check his skills because he was still in the presence of Celine and Owen.

Now that he was alone, nothing would be able to stop him from exploring the job class that almost wiped out his entire party.

< Dispel >

(10 Mana Points)

-- Has a chance to remove a negative buff to a target depending on the user's skill level

Deadly Venom

(10 Mana Points)

-- Fires an orb of concentrated poison at your enemy

-- Has a very high chance to poison enemies

< Contagion >

(10 Mana Points)

-- Range Touch

-- The target contracts one of the following status effects at random: Blind, Poison, Paralysis, Fear, Weakened, and Deafened.

< Void Arrow >

(10 Mana Points)

-- Fires an arrow of darkness at the target that may cause blindness

< Dark Whip >

(10 Mana Points)

- Conjures a whip of Dark Energy.
- Can be used to attack, defend, or let the user maneuver in the terrain.
- No more than two Dark Whips can be created at a time
- Damage dealt is equivalent to Intelligence x 2

< Confuse Ray >

(20 Mana Points)

- Fires a red beam of light to the target that may cause confusion.
- Once the spell succeeds, the target will enter a berserk state. It will randomly attack anyone within its range.

< Unholy Touch >

(20 Mana Points)

(Requires 5 Skill Points to Unlock)

- Range Touch
- Prevents the target from regenerating.
- Healing spells, potions, and other items with healing effects will be rendered ineffective while Unholy Touch is active
- Skill Duration: 20 seconds.

< Spectral Hand >

- Summons a ghostly hand that moves as you desire, allowing you to deliver low-level, touch range spells at a distance.
- The spectral hand is also able to use Dark Whip

< Dark Might >

(10 Mana Points)

-- Infuse weapon with Dark Element

< Dark Mastery >

-- Increases the chance of inflicting status spells to enemies by 10%

-- Increases the damage of Dark Magic by 10%

-- This effect stacks with the Taint Skill.

< Shadow Conjunction >

(100 Mana Points)

-- Creates a shadow replica of the target.

-- The created shadow is able to manifest the target's power by 30%

-- The created shadow can use any skill or spell that the target possesses.

-- You can only order the shadow to attack or defend. It will not listen to any other orders.

-- Only one shadow can exist at a time.

< One with the Darkness >

-- Increases your and your allies resistance to dark magic by 10%

-- Decrease the effect and duration of status ailments applied to you and your allies by 10%

William finally understood that Dark Magic is not like other elemental magics that dealt devastating damage. It focused more on the impairment of the target and using its moment of weakness to finish it off using Seed of Darkness.

Also, the Spectral Hand along with the Shadow Conjunction gives William plenty of alternatives to boost his curses to its limit.

Although Seed of Darkness might look like a weak skill, its deadliness would shine once the target was inflicted with one or more status ailments.

"It may even be stronger than my Glacial Lance at max level," William muttered. "No. It is definitely stronger. This Darkness Seed is quite sinister. It is definitely the strongest magic attack in my current arsenal, but the condition is that a status effect has to be applied to the target..."

What William didn't know, and Celine didn't tell him, was that the skill < Seed of Darkness > was a very rare skill. It was similar to the skill < Dream Eater > that could be acquired by using Celine's grimoire.

In the central continent, aside from William, there were only five people who were able to use this offensive skill that belonged to Dark Magicians. Celine was one of those five people. This just proved how rare this skill was.

'So, which one should I get first?' William mused. 'Should I choose <One with the Darkness> first in order to raise everyone's resistance to Dark Magic, or should I learn a status effect skill first like Void Arrow or Confuse Ray?'

William had seen how effective Void Arrow was because he experienced it first hand. As for Confuse Ray, it doesn't even need to be mentioned. Ella going berserk in the middle of her attack was a very scary sight to see.

Of course, if he wanted to be practical, he could just get the Dispel skill that could effectively remove negative buffs on a target instead of getting the <One with the Darkness> skill.

In the end he decided to raise his Dark Mage Job Level to level 15 first before challenging the Hobgoblin Shaman. Due to Gavin's blessing, he would have a whopping 45 skill points available when he reached his target level.

That would be more than enough to get the skill set he required to have his revenge match with the Hobgoblin Shaman.

'One step at a time.' William smiled as he looked forward to visiting the Goblin Crypt tonight. Fortunately, I discovered Dark Magic early. If not, I might have grown conceited from having a smooth exploration inside the Goblin Crypt.'

After defeating the Millennial Beast, William's confidence had swelled exponentially. Only the latest incident against the Hobgoblin Shaman had managed to bring him down a peg.

While William was busy daydreaming of his eventual victory against the Hobgoblin Shaman, Leah appeared in the goat shed looking for him.

"Aren't you bored staying with goats all day long?" Leah asked as she looked at the lazy boy that was lying so snugly on his Mama's belly.

"Big Sister, as long as I'm with Mama, I will never get bored," William replied with a smile.

"Meeeeeeeh." Ella nodded her head in agreement.

"Hmmm..." Leah eyed William with a curious gaze. "You look very calm. It seems that nobody has told you the latest news regarding what is happening in our kingdom."

"Um? Is there something that I should know?" William asked. He was aware that his grandfather was keeping up to date with the latest news in the kingdom with the help of the messenger birds that were sent by his friends and acquaintances.

John and Blitz would also leave town for a day or two in order to see the current situation of the Beast Tide.

William had been unconscious for three days so he was not aware of the recent development in the kingdom. Since his cousin's "girlfriend" was looking for him, it seemed that something big had indeed happened while he was busy thinking of his own problems.

Leah sighed as she gave William the latest news that had just arrived from the frontline.

"Fort Windermere has been overrun by the Beast Tide," Leah said with a serious expression. "More than half of the defenders have died. Those who survived were rescued by the Gryphon Brigade and brought to Windkeep Citadel in order to solidify the second line of defense."

William frowned. If memory served him right, Windkeep Citadel was the Kingdom's second line of defense just in case Fort Windermere fell to the Beast Tide. During the past Beast Tides, the defenses of the Citadel had been reinforced due to the increasing strength of each attack on the kingdom.

Even so, it was still significantly weaker compared to Windermere Fort.

"What does my Grandpa plan to do?" William inquired. "Is he currently planning to join the fray and earn merits for the kingdom?"

Leah shook her head. "I don't know what Grandpa is planning. However, once Windkeep Citadel has been breached, the Beast Tide will have open access to the inner territories of the Hellan Kingdom."

"Hmmm. I think you don't need to worry about this, Big Sister," William commented. "I'm sure that everyone in the kingdom, including the nobles, have finally realized how dire the situation is."

"I'm sure that our King had already sent out a decree to all the nobles that they must send their private armies to help defend Windkeep Citadel. Big Sister, the Hellan Kingdom isn't that weak. Without a doubt, all the masters in the King's disposal are now headed to the frontlines to deal with the current threat."

"... is that so?" Leah may be smart, but she was still a young girl at heart. She wasn't like William who had read many stories on Kingdom Building, and played many RPG games of the fantasy genre.

William grinned as a thought popped up inside his head. The young boy was sure that his grandfather would definitely not stand by idly. James would certainly join in the fun and earn some merits for Lont. That way, the King would turn a blind eye on the expansion plan that they had started under his nose.

Chapter 50: Hidden Danger Within The Depths

William was unable to go to the Goblin Crypt for two days because his ring was currently being modified by Barbatos, the Blacksmith of Lont.

Of course, that was only one of the reasons. Even though William hated to admit it, he had somehow developed a trauma to entering the Goblin Crypt after their faceoff with the Hobgoblin Shaman.

Similar to when you experience a car accident, you will have a subconscious fear of driving again once you put yourself behind the wheel. Of course, these fears would fade in time. Some even say that the sooner you face it, the less powerful the trauma would be.

William gave himself two days to prepare his heart and mind for the inevitable confrontation that would happen in the future.

James had come to look for him a few hours ago to tell him that he would be taking some of the veterans of Lont to attack the rear of the Beast Tide.

William thought that his grandpa would bring him along on this expedition, but the old man simply said that he should stay in Lont. The reason? According to the reports, there were over twenty Millennial Beasts, and Hundreds of Centennial Beasts.

Those were the ringleaders of the Beast Tide. However, one had best not forget the sheer number of lower-tier beasts that comprised the rest of the Beast Tide. According to an estimate, the numbers had easily surpassed a million.

It was not surprising that Fort Windermere was overrun. The numbers were simply impossible to resist with half-baked forces. Only True Masters would be able to oppose such High-End Monsters and live to tell the tale of their encounter.

'I guess I can't be too greedy,' William thought. 'Getting another 'Bonus Round' might max my job levels, but it will also make me stand out. I guess grandpa didn't want me to appear this early in the game.'

Although it was a bit regretful, William still thought that staying lowkey would be for the best. Since he had the Ring of Conquest, it was only a matter of time before he leveled his job classes to their max levels.

There was no need to be in the spotlight if it was possible to hide in the darkness.

Two days passed by in a blur. William and Ella went to the Blacksmith to get the ring he had commissioned.

"So? Do you like it?" Barbatos asked. "I put aside my other commissions in order to work solely on your ring. Your father saved me once on the battlefield, so this is the least I could do for his son."

"It's perfect," William replied. "Thank you, Mr. Barbatos."

"Well, I'm glad you like it. Now, go. I still have work to do."

"Thank you!"

The ring of conquest had a complete makeover. It was now coated in gold and several rune letters were embedded in the surface of the ring. If not for the fact that William could sense the bond he shared with the ring, he would think that Barbatos had given him a different ring to scam him.

Seeing William's happy expression, Barbatos felt that all the effort he had put in these past two days was worth it. It had not been easy to place an enchantment on the ring because it was a ring that was forged with the flames of Tyr, that could only be found within the Demon Kingdom.

Barbatos, along with his best friend, the Jeweler Seraphy, worked hand in hand to embed the runic words along the ring's surface. It was a monumental task performed by two masters. Even if the reigning Demon King were to stare at the ring, he would definitely not be able to recognize it.

William bowed many times to express his gratitude before he left the smithy. Barbatos watched him go with a smile.

When the boy was no longer within sight, he returned to his forge to catch up on the commissioned works that he had set aside for the past two days.

"William, Oi! William!" Theo called out to him when he saw William walk past his house. "Where are you going?"

"Me? I'm going back home. Why?" William asked back.

"I'm going with Chris and the others to fish in the river," Theo replied. "Want to join us?"

"Fish? Alright! I'm in!" William nodded his head.

He had been cooped up inside the town since the Beast Tide and it was taking a toll on his mental health. Fishing in the river was a good distraction.

The river was only three-hundred meters away from the West Gate of Lont, so the adults guarding the gate decided to turn a blind eye to the kids who were looking at them with pleading eyes.

"Fine," the watchmen said after careful consideration. "You can also swim in the river, but don't go too far. Do I make myself clear?"

He could understand what the kids were going through, so he decided to be a bit more lenient with them today.

"Yes!" the children replied in unison.

Like a band of misfits, the children of Lont cheered and ran in the direction of the river. Of course, some of the adults followed secretly to guard them from the shadows.

William and Ella were the ones in the lead as the other children trailed behind him. When they reached the river, some of the older children took off their clothes and jumped in for a swim. Naturally, not everyone joined them. Others contented themselves with dipping their feet in the water in order to cool off their boredom.

What the kids didn't realize, was that a horde of Dark-Scaled Crocodiles was currently at the bottom of the river. These crocodiles, that were over five meters long, had hidden themselves when the Beast Tide struck the Western Region of the Hellan Kingdom.

Together, they migrated towards Lont for this was a place that had survived the calamity. Originally, they planned to hibernate for a few months, but the boisterous sounds of the children swimming above them made these cold predators open their eyes one by one.

Their bestial instincts were telling them that this opportunity was something that they couldn't miss!