

Vile 531

Chapter 531 Tuan vs. Lily's Team P1

"This was one of the memories of Tista that I wanted to replace."

Tuan whispered in Katalina's ears. The latter wanted to pull away from the guy who took advantage of the moment. But for some reason, her body didn't agree with her thought process. It wanted to be embraced by him just the way it was being embraced at the time.

Tuan ran his hands across Katalina's back as he pulled his neck away from her and looked her in the eyes. He could see that she was confused, a bit angry, and her desire to repay Tuan's gratitude was diminishing.

Tuan knew the hesitation would only make her pull away from him. He needed to end her hesitation by taking matters into his own hands. And that's what he did next.

He raised Kat's face with his hands and kissed her again. The butcher's tongue moved rhythmically as the song played in the background as he inserted it into her mouth. One could say that he was in complete control of his senses and had a mind to spare to enjoy the music while performing such a focus-demanding activity.

It didn't take long for Kat to respond. She hugged Tuan tightly, making him feel like she was trying to merge with his body. Tuan's hands, which were itching to grab something mushy, finally did what they intended to do.

Kat felt her ass getting grabbed by Tuan's hands as he explored her mouth with his ever-restless tongue. She could never have thought that a simple dance session would turn this way with a stranger and her competitor she had just met.

Kat felt her body melting in Tuan's embrace. She wanted things to proceed even further than this casual warm-up. But then she remembered she was a contestant in a tournament that was being observed by the organizers.

She didn't want to be seen in compromising situations even though she subconsciously knew the organizers wouldn't partake in filming such activities. The risk of being targeted by the Amazonians was no small matter.

"Tu... Tuan, there are live feeds. I..."

Katalina broke free from Tuan's kiss and embrace and responded, short of breath. The latter didn't feel disappointed. He nodded his head and pulled her into his embrace once again.

Katalina was about to make an angry face at Tuan's advances on her despite her warnings. But then she felt his hands caressing her face. He smiled before responding to her decision.

"Hmm. Next time, we'll find a place where we won't be watched."

Tuan pulled away from Katalina on his own as he said. He climbed the ledge to sit on it. He intended to finish the remaining gulps of Frostfoam still left in the bottle in peace while admiring the stars.

'How... Why did his wife leave him? Was she braindead?'

As Kat watched him, she couldn't help herself from having this question in her head. She also became curious as to how Tuan could get detached from such an instance so suddenly and function normally like nothing happened.

She sighed and walked towards him before resuming her seated position over the ledge as well. The raid partners then started talking about the plans for tomorrow as if the instance earlier had been nothing more than a dream.

And yet, Katalina could feel a subtle tension in her interactions with Tuan. She felt like Tuan was a man of many facets. Her consciousness wanted to see all of his other sides he hadn't shown her yet.

This tension also made her talk with Tuan some more. She was enjoying the tension and all that it implied. She was also enjoying Tuan's gaze on her, responding to it by making Tuan get subjected to the same gaze of equal intensity from her.

The more she talked with him, the more Katalina realized Tuan hid more cards in his sleeves than he was willing to show. She would hate to admit it, but her mind had been smitten by the intrigue Tuan had to offer to her.

Tuan took the lead and carefully crafted a rough plan for them to deal with any form of the danger posed by the trio they had just met. According to his predictions, they would be safe for the next two days.

Lily and her raid partners would only attack Tuan and Kat when they had gathered sufficient Tuan points by the third day. The hunt should be worth the effort after all.

On the third day of the tournament. Safe area. Lily's Base.

"Today's the day right. I can't contain my excitement right now. It'd be fun to squeeze that Tuan brat's neck for his defiance against us."

Wilder commented as he fist-bumped his own gauntlets together. This was the third day of the tournament. The competitors would start to target each other's raid teams starting from today. Lily and her team were no exception to the rule either. Plus, they had a fixed target in their minds.

"That fire bastard Tuan was hiding a lot of his strength in the competition, it seems. He is already 14th on the Titus list. Who will get his point for themselves?"

Ketsu asked while scratching his stubble that had grown in these three days. He didn't bother grooming these days and kept on watching or keeping tabs on his other competitors.

Lily was there to answer him.

"We don't need to compete within ourselves for his points."

I just want that artefact for myself. If you two stay close to each other while destroying his wristband, the Titus points would get divided between the two of you equally. I had temporarily paired up with a different ranker in these three days when you guys weren't with me and tested it myself."

Lily said while looking at her raid partners intently. She continued after gathering some of her thoughts.

"What's more? That girl Katalina doesn't look like a pushover either. She is 16th in the Titus ranking as of today. So there's no need to fight for Titus points. We'll get plenty for each of us if we can take care of them effectively.

The more pressing question is can you find him, Ketsu?"

Lily said, sharpening her black scimitars on an array platform that would imbue the weapon with wind-element mana. Whenever she made contact with it using her two blades, sparks erupted in the form of ethereal wind-elemental blades in tiny form.

Ketsu smiled wickedly and showed his raid partners an array disk. He imbued it with his mana and made it project a 3D map of the competition area they had explored so far.

There were three dots clustered together in one place, which was representative of all three of them. There were then a pair of red dots located somewhere in the hunting area, far from the blue dots.

"You know who those red dots are, right?"

Chapter 532 Tuan Vs.Lily's Team P2

On the third day of the tournament. Hunting area. Right in the middle of the seemingly vast wilderness.

"Are you sure they'd come today? And how would they know that we are here anyway?"

Katalina asked as she waited for her raid partner to finish setting up something on the ground. The latter stood up from the ground and shook his hands before disappearing from his position. He appeared right next to Katalina and replied.

. c`o`m "I'm sure. We should never underestimate our opponents, Kat. I'm sure they might have a thing or two that can enable them to spy on our location. Especially that ranger fellow who was with Lily.

Hehe! I have prepared a special treat for them. It'll be sad if those guests don't show up for my party."

Tuan commented as he looked into the distance. These three days were very lucrative for him. He had hunted a lot of monsters and mana beasts with Katalina supporting him. They had divided the Titus points as per their contribution in the battles, courtesy of the manual sharing of Titus points offered by the wristband's spectral menu.

Tuan had also battled solo in a bunch of his battles against the beasts and monsters. He tested his Total Control spell effectively and learned how to use it within a few days.

He also took control of his new set of weapons, Anduril. He would often use the spells engraved on the blades to give himself a breather from his constant close combat engagements.

Unbeknownst to most rankers, Tuan had successfully targeted three contestants and taken them down. The battles were brief and one-sided. They all took place in areas with poor live-feed compatibility. It meant that Tuan's battles were prone to glitches when the organizers tried to broadcast them to the outside world.

The organizers considered it odd that Tuan would find such places with ease. They started looking for the cause and found out that Tuan would also use fire-element arrays before commencing his battles with the monsters and mana beasts. They were part of his trap mechanisms.

The array experts commented that Tuan's use of arrays might be the reason behind him creating a disturbance in the live feed. Upon hearing this, the organizers decided not to prevent Tuan from using the arrays. Because that was not against the rules they had already stated.

As a result of Tuan's battles with other contestants happening in the glitch prone recording ground, most of his battles remained a mystery to the viewers and the organizers alike.

And since the upper management had isolated the eliminated contestants until the end of the competition, there was no way to know what took place in the battle.

Despite Tuan's wins, his battle points didn't increase by a large margin. That's because he had battled with top 15 opponents in the Titus list.

The majority of run-of-the-mill and official battle experts concluded that Tuan's opponents had quit on him by opting for the emergency protocol. They must have destroyed the wristbands themselves before the protocol summoned them back from the isolated subspace.

Some battle experts called Tuan unlucky because all his efforts to take down the opponents had gone down the drain. Even if he had managed to stay within the top 15 himself, the gaps between the number 15, number 10, and number 3 segments were exponentially getting wider by the day. It won't be enough to finish in the top fifteen to stay in the tournament. ~~~e`o`m~~

Still, the footage that the organizers could salvage from Tuan's battles made his fans cheer for him with newfound enthusiasm. That's because, in that footage, he looked nothing but even more dominant than before.

All his fire-element attacks had taken a new leap in terms of raw firepower. Tuan's attacks were more precise than before. His speed shocked most of those who had carefully observed him throughout the

competition. They were the ones who linked his overall progress with his higher attainment in the fire element.

Katalina didn't slack around either. She completed cleaning out various pockets of areas in the hunting area. She also sparred with other contenders. She managed to eliminate contestants who placed 23rd and 26th in the Titu list and made their points hers.

She also ran her solo raids and gained a significant amount of Titus points. She and Tuan would form a raid team whenever one of them found a monster nest that was packed full of Novice ranked monsters.

Of course, the duo had their difficulties because of a lack of variation in their classes. Both preferred close-range combat. Plus, none was proficient in ranger spells, making it difficult for either of them to gauge their targets' strengths. The most they could do was identify if the horde of monsters had an Ace or Adet ranked entity in them or not.

Still, that was enough for the two rankers. They would only choose nests they were capable of clearing. Most of the planning was done by Tuan. But Katalina executed her part with just as much efficiency as Tuan had expected from her and then some more.

"We gained a lot during these three days. That's because your decisions are always on point. But sometimes I wonder if you assume too many things will turn out as you expect.

You predict things as per your logic, Tuan. But not every ranker thinks with that much profundity when they make a move."

Katalina commented while resting her back against a giant rock wall that was part of the natural rocky protrusion in the area. This was the site they had used to slay a lot of monsters not too long ago. This was also the site where the glitch of video feedback was going to be present because of Tuan's recent work in the area.

It seemed random. But with Alephee's soul sense, Tuan controlled the timing when the video feed would stop working completely for the viewers and organizers. He just needed to cut the feedback at the very end when the battle was about to conclude.

Katalina had said that they should change the place. But Tuan stopped her and told her that they should be expecting company. But even after an hour had passed, there was nobody around. So Katalina started doubting the predictions made by Tuan.

Tuan didn't open his mouth to explain. In just a few days, Kat had come to recognise the grin he flashed in front of her as he followed his gaze in front of her. She understood that something was up and stretched her mana sense in front of her.

'I don't expect my opponents to move according to my assumptions. I expect them to move according to their schedule. In short, I like to bait my fish. Wouldn't you call me a skilled fisherman, Kat?'

Tuan told Katalina about The latter smiled mirthlessly and drew out her weapon. The battle between the duo of close combat experts and Lily's team was about to unfold.

Chapter 533 Teasing The Assassin

"You don't seem surprised seeing us here."

Lily commented when she appeared like a ghost in front of Tuan. Her two raid partners were catching up to her from behind.

"Hm. Should I act surprised... like this?"

All of a sudden, Tuan painted surprised expressions on his face effortlessly. His eyes were jittery when he did that. His mana sense was fluctuating abnormally as if he was suffering through a mental shock.

Plus, Tuan's body language conveyed the aura of an afraid person. As if he was scared for his life upon seeing his most dreadful enemy coming in front of him out of the blue. If Lily was greeted with the fake face Tuan had just shown her, she would have believed that she had got him.

'This... this chameleon bastard... should win an award for excellent acting.'

Lily commented to herself while maintaining a stoic expression. For some reason, her subconscious mind told her that either she should get the guy on her side or stay as far away from him as possible.

. c`o`m Soon, Lily's acquaintances caught up to her and stood behind her on either side. The realization that Ketsu and Wilder had her back gave Lily enough competition to face her opponents.

"Ketsu, Wilder, just be clear. I'll have the artefact. You can divide the Titus points Tuan has between both of you. But Katalina's Titus points would get divided among the three of us. Are there any objections?"

Lily addressed her raid partners openly. She wanted to highlight her agreement with Ketsu and Wilder once again before they started the battle. But she also wanted to create subtle pressure in the minds of her opponents by provoking them in this way.

"Kat, you can keep that baldy and ranger busy. Beat them however you want.

But that petite assassin ass is all mine. When the opportunity arises in the battle, I intend to slap it as hard as I can. See if it jiggles like a jelly or stays inconspicuous like that lady's boobs."

Tuan said with a serious look on his face. The rankers, including Katalina, froze in their tracks and had baffled expressions on their faces. Ketsu couldn't help but chuckle and look at Lily's posterior while he did that.


Wilder took a while to process the joke. As a result, he became angry with Tuan for underestimating him and found his partner to be enough to handle him. But then he processed the rest of his statements and started laughing.

"Hahahaha! Tuan, my man, I... Cough.. cough ... cough... I mean... I'm sure it would jiggle just fine. It's just that those things are packed tight in those assassin clothes... so"

"Wilder... you shameless prick... shut the fuck up."

Wilder was admonished by Lily before he could finish his sentence. The former used his palm as the suppressant he needed to control his laughter. Ketsu too followed his lead and decided not to make eye contact with Lily when he did that.

Lily decided that it was a terrible idea to play mind games with Tuan. The guy didn't look like it. But he was better at it. This was her second time almost getting tricked by him without him doing anything about it and just using his mouth to speak.

"I suppose you don't want any peaceful resolution, Tuan. That's fine by me." 

Lily said to Tuan while giving him a lowkey hateful look. Then she looked at Katalina before commenting.

"But Miss Katalina, you don't have to suffer because of Tuan, wouldn't you agree? Just hand the artefact over to me and I will permit you to walk out..."

Katalina shook her head in denial before speaking up.

"Forget it. Not happening. This guy is scarier than you."

She pointed at Tuan who was still rocking his fake-shocked expressions. He gave those expressions to Katalina who then had stressed lines on her forehead. She addressed her raid partner with a frown on her face.

"Cut it out!"

Tuan didn't reply with words. He disappeared from his position leaving a flame of the same size as him in his place. It was as if he had been insta combusted into thin air. The next thing Katalina saw was Lily locking both of her swords in a defensive position in front of her.

She barely managed to deflect the orange-red blades that hit against hers in the most violent way

possible. Lily was no expert in frontal combat.

Frankly, the whole competition was such that it didn't allow her to take full advantage of her assassin class. Still, she had learned a lot of support spells to make her capable of tackling frontal combats and long-range attacks.

Lily used rune inscribed clothes that made her resistant to blunt forces. She also drank potions that enhanced her strength and resilience. Plus, the execution of support spells bolstered her strength and other physical attributes a step further.

Yet, she still felt her hands turning numb in a frontal clash with Tuan. That's because Tuan was using his fire-element spells to generate momentum out of nowhere. With the use of Total Control, the explosiveness behind even his normal close combat attacks had increased to a whole new level.

Katalina understood her assignment and attacked Ketsu with her flying slashes. She then used the potion bomb given to her by Tuan on Wilder. With this, she was able to make sure that both of Lily's raid mates stayed on her and away from her fight with Tuan.

"Why should I attack this little girl when I can just attack the man who seems interesting? Hahahaha! Ketsu, look after yourself. I'll beat the crap out of this Tuan brat quickly before joining you."

To Katalina's surprise, the potion bomb did not affect Wilder. The guy didn't even try to dodge the potion or its area of effect. He just stood there in the middle of the bomb's blast and came out unscathed when the dust settled."

"Tuan..."

Katalina tried to warn him. But Tuan was already aware of what was happening around him. He cursed his luck for Lily having a tank-like existence in her team that also seemed capable of fighting like a berserker, sans the use of berserker potions.

'Fuck. I guess some things don't work out according to plan. Maybe I see the situations and assume things that fit my logic.

Chapter 534 Ketsu vs Katalina

'Fuck. I guess some things don't work out according to plan. Maybe I see the situations and assume things that fit my logic.'

Tuan self-reflected for a brief period before turning around to see Wilder coming at him with a wide smile on his face. He disappeared from his position just a moment before Lily pierced the guts of his afterimage and charged ahead to meet the barbarian.

Sedated Perception

Stunning Speed

Total Control

Fire Steps

Fire Wings

Fireball

Fledgelings of the Flame

Tuan didn't hold anything back and sent his mana circuits on overdrive. In the next moment, he was airborne with wings of fire attached to his back.

Lily was met with a pair of two 2-meter long fire snakes that hissed at her before she could pursue their caster. She smiled after seeing the two snakes coming for her. She disappeared from the scene using her assassin class specific spell, not leaving any trace of her behind that could allow the rankers present here to track her.

Lily thought Tuan managing to detect her at the time of the flying shoe artefact was a fluke. So she decided to test that theory again. The animated spell contained the consciousness of a real snake extracted from higher consciousness. It couldn't detect her presence on its own unless its caster was aware of it either.

Too bad, Eren was still aware of her position, thanks to Alephee. The fledglings acted like real snakes and attacked the air as if it were empty. A moment later, an invisible human figure was seen on fire because the snakes had encircled her body with their trunks.

Swoosh!

The snakes' bodies were slashed into multiple pieces before the invisible figure jumped from its position. The mirage of invisibility was snatched away from Lily as she materialized herself not too far away from her previous position.

A volume of smoke was coming from all over her body. She was unscathed. But Tuan's fire element mana had affected her runic clothes, making them catch fire. She would have gotten some burns if these mana-strengthened runic clothes weren't on her.

'Haah! I guess I need to take care of these damn snakes first.'

Lily gave up on sneaking up on Tuan while he was battling with Wilder. She took a glance at her opponent and clenched her fist before running towards the snakes. She had meant at her disposal to take care of animated spells after all.

"You won't win this battle. I suggest you give up your claim on that artefact and walk away from this mess. Even if we would fight it out eventually, it doesn't have to be today when you are less prepared."

Ketsu addressed Katalina while not uttering a word from his mouth. His sound-element spell allowed him to produce sound from any point in space where his mana sense could reach.

'Tuan was right. It's no fun being targeted. The fun starts when you target your opponents and take things from them instead of finding ways to keep their hands away from yours.'

While she was looking at her shoes, Katalina thought to herself that she had become fond of them lately. She hmphed in response to Ketsu's statement and attacked him once again using her flying slashes. This time though, she didn't stop sending her attacks at the ranger. He was trying to keep his distance from her with his ranger specific spells that were more effective in the long range.

She flew in the air using her artefacts and approached Ketsu. The latter was made aware by his mana sense that the flying slashes were closing in on him before his eyes could even perceive them. Just then, he saw Katalina flying. Before he could think of a strategy to deal with any more incoming attacks heading his way, he found out that the close combat expert had appeared right above his head.

Katalina had used an inscribed spell on her artefact. She felt glad that the spell worked exactly as she had hoped and caught the ranger off guard. Usually, she would struggle with the ranger class which was common among the close combat experts. Her shoes helped her overcome this weakness.

Swoosh!

Katalina delivered another series of flying slashes toward Ketsu before appearing behind him. She then used another spell at her disposal and generated two wind-element cannons to fire at Ketsu.

Katalina forced Ketsu to face the flying slashes she had executed in the very beginning. The ranger used his movement spell and disappeared from his position. He was soon about to face the flying slashes with the disc-shaped sound-element barrier he had generated in front of him.

Just then, an owl's hoot was heard. Ketsu looked back to see Katalina standing at his previous position, pointing upwards. Her contract beast was approaching Ketsu at critical velocity with its talons stretched. It also released a rain of wind-element shrapnels that looked like its feathers.

Katalina saw Ketsu generate the second disc-shaped barrier above him to save himself from the owl's feather-shaped shrapnels. He was just about to strike his first barrier when the wind elemental slashes at him. The next moment, shrapnel struck his second barrier.

Ketsu had his hands full. He was about to change his position when he sensed the wind-element cannons firing a pair of compressed balls of white mana from two different directions.

"Oh, fu..."

A mana blast occurred at Ketsu's position. Katalina showed her opponent as well as her fans that she hadn't reached this stage through sheer luck. She was capable of overwhelming other competitors if they dared to mess with her.

To her surprise, however, she saw Ketsu still standing firmly at his place. He was injured. His blood was starting to come out of various places on his body.

The compressed ball of wind-element mana released needle-like shrapnels that had pierced his natural ana defence to some degree and ruptured his skin all over his body.

"You... you almost had me."

Ketsu commented while holding his pierced shoulder with a hand, which was leaking blood. His other hand was placed over his heart.

Chapter 535 Calling Her Bluff

"You... you almost had me."

Ketsu commented while holding his neck which was leaking blood with one hand. His other hand was placed over his heart.

Ketsu had used a defensive spell he had at his disposal at the right time that allowed him to fend off almost all of the shrapnels targeting his body. He feared he might have been critically injured if he hadn't deployed the spell at an optimal time.

The ranger didn't like using his defensive spell. That's because his element wasn't compatible with defensive spells and anything that was related to the materialization of mana.

He had to convert sound-element mana into sound waves that would stack upon one another and act as a defensive layer around his body. He depended on the density of the sound waves as well as the kinetic energy stored in them to deflect the attacks targeting him. As a result, his mana expenditure was too high whenever he executed those spells.

The disc-shaped sound element barriers he had used earlier were the lighter version of the same concept employed by his primary defensive spell. It changed the direction of the attacks and any shrapnels so that they missed their targets, rather than deflecting them completely.

Ketsu had his mana storage halved to half its capacity instantly a few moments into the battle. He had to admit that Katalina had got him good.

Katalina had picked up a thing or two after observing how Tuan fought during these three days when they raided monster nests together. His attacks always left an opening behind them and made his opponents choose or prioritize that opening. Then he would set traps covering that opening, which would get triggered as soon as his opponents passed through them. The butcher had been using the array-traps extensively ever since he had gotten a hand of them. That's because he was used to such tactics.

After seeing the way Tuan fought, Katalina couldn't help but be inspired by his battle style. She tried to mimic him in her fight against Ketsu. She had come to realize that most of Tuan's traps were unavoidable because of the way they worked. Even if one's opponent knew that there might be traps ahead, they would still subconsciously choose to prioritize their safety by avoiding immediate dangers.

These kinds of traps were based on the survival instincts of ranking entities. As long as the targets can't overcome the survival instincts they have, they won't be able to save themselves from falling into such traps.

Ketsu used his arm's sleeves to wipe the blood that was all over his face. He then took a long breath before summoning his weapons. Two rune-inscribed flintlocks made their appearance in Ketsu's either hand. He gripped them firmly before imbuing them with his sound-element spell.

There was no sound.

But suddenly Katalina felt a white noise that permeated through her whole body. The next thing she knew, her vision had gotten blurred and she had lost control of her footing.

Ketsu had fired his sound bullets at Katalina and denoted them a moment before they hit her. His firing rate was low. But due to his element's specialty, he could fire from a long-range and control his bullets' trajectory and detonation with his mana sense.

Aaaaaaah!

Katalina gripped her head with both her hands and pulled her hair due to sound-element mana affecting her senses. The detonation of sound waves affected her sense of direction and compromised her vision. Her hearing capabilities were temporarily lost. She couldn't even hear her own screams.

Ketsu had been preparing his sound-element attack for a long time before the sonic bullets made their appearance. He only pulled out the artifacts with which he could extend the range of his stacked spells when they were ready.

Ketsu imbued his mana into the flintlocks once again. He also cast the defensive disk barriers to keep himself safe from harm while he recharged the flintlocks.

Katalina decided to be decisive when her head was splitting with the sounds of so many things all at once. Consequently, that overwhelming sound had cleared her mind of any confusing thoughts.

Then there was one thought that had been lurking inside her brain for the last few days. Before, it had been overshadowed by all her other dominant thoughts. But then, at this moment, it found its chance to shine.

At that time, she remembered Tuan's words about not being intimidated by others.

'Sometimes, you need to turn off the switch of sanity to win over your opponent.'

Katalina reiterated Tuan's words in her now-empty head and decided to act on them.

She took control of her situation by sending her mana circuits into hyperdrive in the next moment. This was done without allowing her mana points to relay the mana they had forward.

As a result, her body started turning red. The surface-level muscle tendons on her limbs started swelling.

"Aaaaaaaaah!"

Katalina couldn't help screaming in pain. As a result of her insane act, most of the foreign sound-element mana got expelled from her system at the cost of damaging her internal organs. She chose to partake in self-harm to gain control over her body. Unknown to the butcher, his words had converted a superior-than-average ranker into a battle-hardened personality.

Katalina's spells were about to disperse due to her losing control. So when she snapped out of her pain in the next moment, the wind-element ranker provided them with a significant amount of mana without having to worry about mana consumption.

Katalina's beast contract spell received a large chunk of her mana. Her owl produced a sharp sound in the next moment that wasn't very owl-like and attacked Ketsu with newfound vigor.

Ketsu was about to be done charging his flintlocks when he suddenly felt pressurized. He was attacked first by cannon shells coming from two directions. Then the owl cast its spell and made him change his position constantly.

As if that was not enough, he saw Katalina coming at him without any fear in her eyes despite him holding the flintlocks. Ketsu had studied his opponents. According to his recons and the profile he had created for Katalina, she wasn't this aggressive. She should have prioritized her safety first before coming at him like some kind of daredevil with vengeance on their mind.

'What... what the fuck has happened to her in these days?'

Ketsu asked himself. He then thought that Katalina was putting up a front and decided to call her bluff.

Chapter 536 wild wild Wilder

'What... what the fuck has happened to her in these days?'

Ketsu asked himself. He then thought that Katalina was putting up a front and decided to call her bluff. He pointed his flintlocks at her and fired a series of bullets made out of incomplete spell castings in her direction.

he effects of these dummy sound bullets weren't anywhere near the real deal. But these bullets were easy to cast. Ketsu would always mix them with his real ones to deter his opponent from charging at him.

He was a ranger after all. He liked to keep his opponents at a distance from him.

Katalina saw the bullets and changed her direction midway. It was her logical side that caused her not to charge at her enemy. In the end, she couldn't keep the switch of sanity turned off for long. Some habits die hard, after all. It is not that her decision was not the right one for her in her situation. The wind-element ranker had managed to keep her safe from immediate harm while preventing herself from getting beaten by her opponent.

Katalina retreated to a safe distance before staring at her opponent. They were both bloody and in an almost identical situation. There was a short stalemate before the decisive battle would soon begin.

"Tuan, I have been itching to fight with you for a long time. Hahahaha! I'm sorry for laughing at your misery, but what happened to you was really funny."

Wayne Wilder said while pounding his fists against one another and adjusting his gauntlets against one another. Then he poured his mana into them and spiky protrusions formed over the knuckles.

It meant that Wilder's attacks were not limited to blunt force damage. He could also inflict puncture wounds on his opponents with the help of his wearable artifacts.

Wayne scratched his beard with his artifact-wearing hand and commented once again.

"I say let the bitch leave if she wants to. A guy like you can surely find another one."

While smirking, Wilder finished what he wanted to say to Tuan.

"In any case, you'd have to go out and explore the world to find your next true love. Why wait till the competition is over? Let me help you embark on your soulmate searching journey by eliminating you right here and now. Hahahaha!"

Boom!

A meteor-like fire-element spell crashed onto Wilder's position as soon as he finished saying what he had to say. The image of Tuan that he was seen talking to turned out to be an afterimage.

Tuan had decided not to engage in a verbal spat with the barbarian. From his understanding, the bald muscle maniac only understood the language of fists. So that's how he was planning to communicate with him.

When the dust settled, Tuan could see that there was a giant, semi-transparent tortoiseshell covering Wilder's body within it. Slowly, that shape expanded and grew limbs. The last to be formed was the tortoise head that stretched and looked at Tuan with a menace in its eyes. It released a series of guttural sounds to intimidate him as well.

'A barbarian with a tortoise-type contract beast. How odd!'

Tuan commented to himself and created a distance between the tortoise and Wilder. The latter stepped out of his contract beast's semi-transparent body and poured more mana into his spell. As a result, the tortoise's semi-transparent body solidified and looked like the real deal.

Wilder jumped on his contract beast's back and stood on it with his hands locked behind his back. Wilder continued to speak casually as if Tuan's earlier attack didn't mean anything to him.

"Boy, I tried having a few words with you before our duel. But it seems you are in a hurry to receive a beating. If that's what you want, then be my guest. Luko Shanko, have at him."

'Who names their contract beast with such a weird name? This guy is the definition of weird.'

Tuan had this thought when he heard Wilder's words. But his expression changed in the next moment when he saw the tortoise running at him at an unbelievable speed.

'What the... tortoises were supposed to be slow.'

Stunning Speed

Sedated Perception

Fire Steps

Fire Wings

Tuan executed all the spells that would allow him to dodge a mini hill-like contract beast with ease. He dodged to the side and jumped before using his Fire Wings to glide out of the troubled position.

While in the air, he pulled up the military database entry on the mana beast he had just dodged. According to the database, the mana beast was called Gopher Earth Tortoise.

Just like he had seen just now, the species had a parakeet-like beak serving as its mouth. It was an earth-element mana beast that was known for its resilient shell and various earth-element-based attacks.

The tortoise species wasn't known for its speed. But there were always variants induced by the inclusion of mana. Kind of like an exception to every rule.

The Gopher Earth Tortoise species would sometimes produce a deviant mana beast that was capable of overcoming its inherent slow speed by unlocking an innate spell. It would generate an anti-gravity field below its hooves and use it to speed up its steps. As a result, the mana beast had an excellent speed without its steps making any sort of noise or impact on the ground.

Tuan read all the information the military database had on the mana beast while he was in his Sedated Perception. Then he closed his spectral screen and observed his next landing.

To his surprise, he found out that the mana beast had almost caught up to his diversion. It wouldn't be long before it reached the same place he was about to land. At the same time, he could see that the mana beast had used its earth-element spell. There was a circle of spikes forming with Tuan's supposed landing spot as the center.

The mana beast was trying to box Tuan in. Tuan was about to change directions by controlling his Fire Wings in the air. But then he realized Wilder was not sitting atop the tortoise's shell anymore. He knew something was wrong and turned around.

Wilder laughed when he saw Tuan around just before he was about to hit him with his spiked punch. He didn't hesitate and coated his hands in earth-element mana. The spikes in his hands grew about 15 inches as a result.

The attack started looking less like a punch and more like a bunch of spike-like protrusions stacked together to impale somebody. Wilder served as the prime example of how wild the barbarians could get in their attacks and their battle style.

"See you outside, boy. Don't let anyone take your next woman ever again. Hahaha!"

Chapter 537 Barbarian Wway

"See you outside, boy. Don't let anyone take your next woman ever again. Hahaha!"

Wilder spoke out loud before landing his punch on Tuan. But as soon as he did that, he knew his attack had been dodged. That's because he didn't receive any feedback of impact through his punch.

Wilder was just about to turn to his right when he saw an orange-slash heading for his neck. He raised his hands to block it with his artifact-protected palm.

Clank!

A metallic sound made its acoustic appearance. Tuan's attack was stopped. But then Wilder felt something strike his chest. The next thing he realized was the fact that Tuan had bolted from the scene using his movement spell and Fire Wings at a greater speed than he had shown earlier.

'How the fuck his guy is so fast....'

Wilder was about to finish his chain of thoughts when he looked down at his chest again where he felt some weird sensation. He observed that now there was a star-shaped array mark printed all of a sudden over his tank-top. A black ink spread on its own, maintaining the form of the star as it spread.

Soon, the ink made it past the tank top and spread all over his body. The star-shaped array attached itself firmly to Wilder's torso. The small array trap used his own mana as glue that Wilder was leaking through his body's natural defenses to keep the vial of potion bomb stuck to him.

This vial of potion was placed in the middle of the star-shaped array. And it was changing its color rapidly. Wilder immediately understood what it was when he saw it. He would have never thought that the Tuan guy he had seen battling in the competition would use something like a potion bomb. That too in combination with an array trap.

Wilder tried to pull the vial stuck to his chest with all his might. But he could feel that he wouldn't be able to pull that vial from its position before breaking the array trap first. And it'd be too late if he tries to break the array trap.

"This mother fuck..."

BOOM!

The potion bomb exploded when Tuan landed on his spot a sufficient distance away from Wilder. The butcher looked back to see Wilder as well as his contract beast getting engulfed by a dense cloud of flames.

Tuan retrieved a scroll and opened it. There was the same star-shaped array trap's layout printed over it. He placed his hands over the layout and imbued his mana. In the next moment, the array trap vanished from the scroll and appeared over his palm.

Tuan had reloaded the array trap layout over his palm because he knew one blast would not be enough to take care of Wilder.

His guess was right. A distinct mana pulse was released from within the cloud of flames soon afterward.

"Aaaaargh!"

Wilder came out of the cloud of flames and smoke screaming. He had an earth-element armor spell covering every inch of his body. However, it looked like it had been cracked. The flames had managed to penetrate his defensive spell with the help of the potion bomb's explosive power.

"Aaaaah! You motherfucking son of a bitch, I'll fucking kill you."

Then Wilder disappeared from his position. The defensive spell he had cast had taken the shape of his body. After the caster left the defensive spell, the empty shell remained in its position. It crumbled soon afterward.

The man that had emerged from the earth armor now had crack-shaped burn marks all over his body.

Only the clothes near his groin had been saved due to the baldy prioritizing his junk's safety. All his other clothes were lost. As a result, the burn marks could be clearly seen. They looked like tiger stripes on his tanned body.

Wilder charged at Tuan with an exceptional speed he hadn't shown before. It was clear that he was pushing the boundaries of his spell beyond the scope of their normal output. Thanks to his class-specific trait, he could bring out 120 percent of any of his spells' effects at the cost of enraging him and decreasing his intelligence.

The barbarian way of enhancing a spell's effect was a dual-edge weapon. It was focused on the ranker's rage-controlling abilities. As the rage of the barbarian builds up, it lowers the intelligence stat. After it dips below a certain value, the ranker won't be able to cast any more spells until their intelligence stat recovers.

The more rage a barbarian felt, the more powerful the effect of their chosen spell would be. It would also expedite the process of barbarians not being able to cast any more spells. The rage-driven mentality would also compromise the ranker's natural thought process, making it difficult for them to plan and think clearly after analyzing the situation.

Tuan could feel that Wilder was trying to maintain his rage to keep his contract beast spell active. Tuan didn't know but Wilder had ordered his contract beast to cast his shell-like defensive spell on him.

That's how he survived the blast. The defensive armor spell he had used earlier only took half the burnt, which had been escaped in his direction due to the shell-like spell cast by his contract beast.

Wilder was a bit apprehensive about Tuan's insidious way of using array traps and potion bombs. Wilder maintained the beast contract spell for the fear of having to use Luko Shanko again, commanding the beast to cast its shell spell protection on him.

Wilder's earth-element movement spell was also based on gravitational force. The bald ranker glided over the ground as if he was ice-skating on the most slippery grounds.

Tuan smiled cruelly when Wilder was approaching him. He gripped his orange-red swords tightly before releasing a flying slash at the guy. This time it wasn't just a regular attack obtained by imbuing weapons with elemental mana.

Invi-Blaze!

The inscribed spell of Tuan's orange-red swords.

Wilder didn't see anything. He didn't even feel the attack until it was too late. The next thing he knew, his torso had been inflicted with a bloody sword cut.

Chapter 538 Fire Wings and Invi Blaze Combo

Invi-Blaze!

Wilder didn't see anything. He didn't even feel the attack until it was too late. The next thing he knew his torso had been inflicted with a bloody sword wound. It cut from the upper extremity of his right leg to his left shoulder.

The sword cut caused the wound to catch fire before the blood could make its presence known. Also, it cauterized the wound instantly, preventing the blood from escaping.

'Hmm. That's a negative side effect of using Invi Blaze. It would have been better if he had bled a bit. Then again, I can't control my attack after it gets delivered like AI. So it's not the blades' fault.'

Tuan thought while processing the details happening around him. Wilder, on the other hand, felt like super hot, high-pressure air had entered his system when the sword wound first hit him. And when the wound caught fire, his nervous system was overwhelmed with pain receptors working overtime.

"Aaargh!"

Wayne cried out with no restraints on his vocal cords. But then...

"Aaaaaaaah! Aaaaaaaah!"

Hahahahahahaha! This is more like it. Hahahahaha!"

The barbarian yelled in pain at first. But then Tuan saw his yell turn into joyous laughter. As if he had learned to embrace his pain and found something worthwhile in it.

Tuan had forgotten the fact that just like berserkers tapped into their madness to bring out 120 percent of themselves, barbarians would use their anger to fuel their attacks and defense. Some barbarians would also be able to boost their instant recovery the angrier they felt.

Each class had its advantages and disadvantages. No class would reign supreme all the time. But the barbarians were made for upfront battles. Because anger was one of the most primal emotions a ranker was subjected to in such battles, especially when they were on the losing end.

Tuan knew something was up. He could see Wilder's wound getting closed at a visible rate even in his near-stagnant world. He had maintained a safe distance from him because of the guy's overwhelming strength. But when he saw Wilder's healing spell doing more than it was supposed to do, the butcher knew the time to play defensive was over.

Invi Blaze!

Invi Blaze!

Invi Blaze!

Invi Blaze!

Tuan sent a bunch of flying slashes toward Wilder while he was encircling him with his movement spell. He then jumped high and cast his signature spell.

Fire Wings!

This time, Wilder was ready for the slashes. Similarly, his contract beast appeared right next to him at just the right moment to secure him inside its semi-transparent body.

The contract beast cried in pain and agony when the flying slashes hit its body. Just as it was about to look up to see the butcher's position, it was struck by a massive blow over its shield-like shell.

Boom!

Fire Wings and Invi Blaze!

The attack initiated by Tuan looked like the red-orange-looking meter was covered in white rings around it as it was crashing onto its intended target. The white rings were there because Tuan had used his blades' inscribed spell without releasing it. As a result, the rings formed as Tuan spun around himself to perform the meteor strike.

The shield broke.

The mana body of the contract beast was dispersed, revealing the Barbarian inside who was using a healing spell to try to heal himself. Still, there was no rest for the wicked.

Boom!

Tuan's enhanced meteor strike struck Wilder's back as soon as the first defense broke. A bunch of Invi Blaze attacks was released at the same time from Tuan's weapon set all at once.

There was no cry of pain this time. Tuan created a distance from the crater Wilder had now found himself in and raised his swords in front of him. A flame was burning in the middle of the crater that was also sending waves of heat haze in all directions.

Wilder's body caught on fire. It was enveloped in Tuan's overwhelming fire-element mana that acted as the flame's fuel.

"You... you are one of a kind, Tuan Aag. Hehe. I'm glad I could fight you here.

But don't write me off just yet.

Let me show you what a barbarian can do when they lose themselves in their rage.

Receive me well with all you got, boy. Because this duel has just stopped being a part of the competition for me. Hehe! This would be fun."

Wilder stated while sounding utterly peaceful. He didn't sound this content within himself even while he was laughing before the battle began. Tuan could feel that Wilder too knew how to turn the switch of his sanity off.

A bunch of warning bells sounded in Tuan's head all at once. Before he could act on them, Wilder was already on his tail throwing his gauntlet-enhanced punch at him.

Sedated Perception

Stunning Speed

Fire Steps

All of Wilder's senses including his instincts were only tasked with one goal. Kill Tuan— the guy who had become the reason for his uncontrollable rage. His rage had reduced his intelligence, which prevented him from performing the spells he wanted when he wanted. He couldn't formulate any plan or stick to one anymore.

Barbarians did not need to plan their rage mode anyway. It worked purely on instincts and the capabilities of rankers' bodies. The more well-endowed a barbarian's body was, the more time they would be able to sustain rage mode.

Wilder subconsciously sensed that Tuan was already getting away from its range of attacks even when he had caught him off guard. So he used his earth-element spells to prevent him from escaping.

In the next moment, Tuan found out that there were a bunch of earth-element walls rising all around him in various layers. Plus, there were spikes in the earth preventing him from fleeing in specific directions.

What's more? The ground on which the battle was fought had patches of large potholes and small dunes which could hinder his progress. Tuan's movement spell got less effective because his steps didn't get the footing needed for it to work the way it was supposed to work.

Not to mention the fact that Wilder's movement spell had also been bolstered by his rage mode. Tuan saw in slow motion as the guy caught up to him in what felt like a blink of an eye in a non-stagnant world.

'Oh fuck!'

Chapter 539 Disarming the Assassin

'Oh fuck!'

Tuan cursed as a spiked punch was directed right at his guts. He dodged most of the spikes targeting different parts of his body. But Wilder used his earth-element mana to create more spikes sprouting from the knuckles of his fists. They also had a metallic shine to them now that Wilder had entered the barbaric state.

Tuan's body had already been punctured before the blunt force acting on it, sent him tens of meters away from his previous position. Wilder didn't give his opponent a chance to recover. He followed after Tuan and landed some more punches at him.

Wilder lost himself in his rage. He would react instinctively to the butcher's every move and find the most effective strategy to counter it at the cost of self-harming him as well. As a result, Wilder suffered grievous injuries to his body as well. But his opponent's condition was much more serious than his.

By the time Wilder was kicked out of the rage stage forcefully by his body, Tuan was barely standing on his two legs. He had gaping holes all over his body as a result. Some of the leaked blood had painted him red, making him appear as if he had bathed in a pool of blood.

Tuan and Wilder both maintained a distance from each other after their brief spar that the latter had won. But they knew this temporary truce would be broken by anyone, anytime.

Tuan had prevented the blood from spilling from the wounds with the help of his natural mana defense acting as the barrier. But he knew he wouldn't be able to hold his condition for much longer. But that was still secondary on his list of priorities.

Sedated Perception

Stunning Speed

Total Control

Since Eren was struggling, Alephee cast his go-to time element spell herself to help him. She hadn't done this since his first duel with Renita in the Ranking Wars. The butcher had always been careful not to get himself cornered. He had taken every precaution he could.

But since he wasn't using his lightning-element spells, it translated to him battling with an experienced and exceptional Ace ranker handicapped. He had to face the consequences of his actions.

'Eren, you lost control over your animated spells. That assassin's attack is incoming. 8 O clock. Don't try to dodge it. Deflect it the way I tell you, when I tell you.'

Tuan's blurred mind got some form of clarity as he was forcefully pulled into the near stagnant world by Alephee. Had she not done that, he would have been able to use the lightning element spells and blown his cover. It was a matter of survival for him after all.

Tuan didn't answer Alephee verbally. He handled Lily's attack the way Alephee wanted him to. As a result, the assassin was disarmed before her neck was grabbed by the butcher.

He grabbed both her hands behind her back with one hand. Then he spun her around and made her act as a shield for him. Her back touching the front of his torso.

"You think you can sneak up on me without any consequences, huh? Think I'm only proficient with words, do you?"

Butcher said and slapped Lily's ass hard. He had done it using his hand covered in fire-element mana that tore a bit through her runic suit and inflicted a substantial blunt force on her tush. Her now-slightly-exposed buttock featured a red and slightly burnt hand print over it as a result.

There was nothing erotic about Tuan hitting Lily's ass the way he did. He just thought that he should honor the words that he had stated before the start of the match. He also increased the strength behind his grip on Lily's neck, making her feel like her neck would snap in two before she died of asphyxiation.

Contrary to what Lily had thought, Tuan didn't give her any concession just because she was a female ranker. He treated her with equal fierceness his other opponents were subjected to.

"Wilder, cough cough cough... you bald-headed maniac. You couldn't even take care of... cough cough... I'll give you that artifact you asked for... cough cough... Now help me."

Lily made a deal with Wilder while she was being held by Tuan. He had also placed his other hand over her head while coating it with fire-element mana. He had one of Arundel's hilts being held by his teeth. The sword's edge was in line with her neck which was covered by his grip.

Tuan didn't wait for Lily to finish her deal with Wilder. He had already started moving in a particular direction, hoping Katalina would be ready for the move. He maintained the reins he had leashed on Lily while moving in that direction to control her movements.

Wilder was utterly exhausted after he had been kicked out of his rage state. His body ached and hurt all over. His mana circuits had been suspended in the hyperdrive for so long that they couldn't be brought back to normal anytime soon. His internal injuries were growing by the moment as a result.

He was planning on letting Lily handle Tuan when he got off the barbarian-class-specific power boost. But he felt disappointed in his raid partner when she was caught so effortlessly. He was planning to save

her anyway since she still had some use for him in the coming days. Even so, the offer she relayed to him made her rescue all the more tempting.

Wilder let Tuan create a distance from him willingly. He instead chose to stabilize his condition for the next attack. He didn't want to enter the rage state and make his condition even worse. Plus, his mana storage was almost depleted. So he needed a sure-shot way of taking care of Tuan without burning his or Lily's hands in the process.

Wilder put his spiked gauntlets away and took out his mace. This was an artifact he rarely used because it was used to deliver overwhelming blunt force, killing most of his opponents in the process. As a ranker, he was given a lot of tasks that required his targets not to die. Hence, Wilder limited the use of his main weapon and replaced it with the gauntlets.

Furthermore, now he had much better control over directing his strength at an isolated spot. The weapon made sure that the impact didn't deviate from its intended spot.

Wilder first cast his earth element spells and created walls and spikes in Tuan's path of escape. He didn't have to do much because the butcher stopped retreating as soon as the walls started surrounding him. Wilder thought his opponent was beaten by exhaustion too, just like him.

"Aaaaaaaa!"

Wilder released another battle cry before changing at Tuan with his remaining mana and all that he had.

Chapter 540 Switching Places

"Aaaaaaaa!"

Wilder released another battle cry before changing at Tuan with his remaining mana and all that he had. He had to admit that Tuan had pushed him to his limits. He was a lot tougher than he had initially thought him to be.

"Hahahaha! Tuan, I have to admit, you surprised me. You deserve to be in the Titus finals, kid. But your journey ends here."

Wilder opened his eyes that he had closed briefly and commented. Tuan could feel that something had happened to the barbarian when he opened his eyes. It was as if he had been given sufficient time to recharge himself.

Wilder had another barbarian class-specific spell he could use with the help of a class-intrinsic spell that acted on his body. For a brief period, he would be able to revitalize himself and use the environment mana as his own without having to channel it through his mana core.

The barbarian class had access to pretty weird spells. It also accommodated a lot of battle styles that ranged from raw to refined. But the class wasn't an exception when it came to having to deal with the aftereffects of one's actions.

The consequence of using this class-intrinsic spell was that he would be bedridden for a couple of days. His mana core could also be temporarily damaged by processing the environmental mana unfiltered.

Wilder's rage state would also be compromised until the residual unprocessed mana has gotten rid of. Pure mana in its surroundings would contain the will of the world. When he taps into the rage state while his unprocessed mana is still in his system, he might become a ranker who has lost their identity.

Wilder won't be able to make full use of his barbarian class even if he finds a way to heal himself using the help of potions. Normally, he wouldn't do something like this for Lily because they were only temporary allies.

But Lily had something Wilder needed. An earth-element armor artifact that allowed for enhanced healing after sustaining damage on any part of the wearer's body. It could pair well with the healing spell and his rage mod combo, making him forget about the self-harm tactics he used to get himself involved against his better judgment.

The artifact could also help him recover from the adverse effects of using the class-intrinsic spell. Lily knew that Wilder wouldn't try to save her under normal conditions. He would wait for Ketsu to be done with dealing with Kat before teaming up with him to take Tuan down. So she threw a bait at him knowing that he would bite. She only held on to the armor so she could get higher value for money from earth-element rankers anyway. But now, nothing was more important to her than staying in the Titus competition.

But both of them forgot about the possibility that Tuan might be using Lily as bait to make Wilder attack him. Often, being part of the colors prevents one from seeing the big picture.

Tuan allowed Wilder to approach him with patience and calm. On his face bloomed a cunning smile he had not previously shown to Lily's team. In that moment, Lily, who was closest to him, felt something was amiss. She tried to warn Wilder about it. But her neck was choked even harder than before as a result.

The next couple of seconds were kind of like a blur to Wilder and Lily. When he had approached Tuan, he had made sure that Katalina and Ketsu were far away from interfering in their duel. He didn't want the butcher to have any last-minute respite.

Yet, when he was just an arm's length away from Tuan, he found out that the butcher had disappeared along with Lily. Ketsu had appeared in their place with equally shocked expressions.

"Wilder..... Don't"

Ketsu cried and raised his flintlocks in front of him. He fired at the barbarian's thighs so that he would be stopped from taking any threatening steps toward him. But it was already too late.

Ketsu's sound bullet inflicted more damage to Wilder on top of the damage he was already suffering from. The round of bullets, however, could not put an end to the barbarian's momentum. Plus, a ranger like Ketsu wasn't proficient in close combat. He had poured all his efforts into maintaining his distance from Kat for the same reason.

Wilder could only divert his weapon's attack at the last moment in order to control the assault on his raid partner. And that's what he did. Ketsu was spared from having a life-threatening injury because of the guy he called muscle-brain keeping his muscles and brain in check.

Yet, the pain was unavoidable for both of them.

Boom!

"Fuck.... You fucking baldy...."

"Aaaaaaaaah... my brain...."

Ketsu and Wilder both cried loudly in unison. Wilder crashed onto the ground Ketsu stood on with his hands clutching his head. The muscles of his legs were affected by the sound-element mana invading his system too.

Ketsu was sent tens of meters away from the ground zero of the attack. They were both unaware that the butcher had placed a space element array even before Lily's team visited him.

The butcher had once seen the usefulness of a space element array in action when he was against Claho and his army buddies. She had used his space-element pendant artifact as the basis for creating a separate channel for mana to be supplied to him inside the array that was made to lock him from casting lightning spells.

The butcher had asked about the inner workings of the array Layla had used along with the way his space element pendant could be incorporated into it. Since the minimal damage it had sustained was rectified by Layla later on, it could be repurposed for space element arrays like the one he had used a few moments ago.

The butcher was yet to utilize the artifact the way it was designed to be utilized. But with his increasing studies and interest in the field of arrays along with his consultation with Layla and Alephee, he was able to draw an array that could pull off such a feat.

This was a contingency plan he had already told Kat about. She had led Ketsu at the right position for Tuan to switch places with him at the crucial time.