

W. Secret 281

Chapter 281: Strange Whirlpool

On the nameless island, Wizard Bayton waited patiently outside the volcano. Occasionally, there were some wicked-looking insects that would crawl up beside him, but they were all exterminated by the spells that Wizard Bayton had cast.

“Fire!”

A wave of Fire elements sparkled on Wizard Bayton’s body. He had cast another Fire-type spell, the scorching flame burning with intensity as it disintegrated two black beetles into ashes.

“Dong! Dong! Dong!”

Right then, it felt as though the whole ground started quaking.

“Hmm? What’s going on?”

Wizard Bayton scanned his surroundings. It seemed that there was an earthquake. However, when he looked further, puffs of black smoke started billowing from within the volcano, so he figured out the real reason for the quake.

“Not good, the volcano is going to erupt!”

Wizard Bayton had seen a volcano eruption before. Although it was only a view from afar, that kind of horror and shock implanted a huge impression in his mind.

This type of volcano eruption was terrifying. Even a Seventh-level Spell Caster would need to deal with it cautiously. If one was inside the volcano, incomparably hot lava would spew out in that instant. Even if it was a Seventh-level Spell Caster, when facing boiling hot lava aided by the horrifying ejection force of the volcano, one would not be able to protect themselves against it too.

“Wizard Merlin is still inside the volcano!”

There was a slight reluctance in Wizard Bayton’s eyes. Now, the ground quaked even more violently. This signified that the volcano was stirring up a ferocious eruption, and once that happens, the entire island would be in a dire state!

“No, before the volcano erupts, I must quickly get Wizard Merlin out of there.”

Wizard Bayton inhaled deeply, then propelled himself into the air, flying toward the volcano which was billowing with black smoke.

...

“It’s so hot! If I keep on like this when the volcano really erupts, it’ll only be a dead end for me! I must leave the volcano as soon as possible!”

Merlin sensed a gradual emergence of intense danger from the base of the volcano. He knew that the lava was in turbulence, and was about to be expelled from the volcano. By that time, even a Seventh-level Spell Caster would not survive, much less himself.

Now, he had to leave as soon as possible.

Originally, Merlin thought that he still had time to cut out more Lava Soil which were embedded in the rock wall. However, the situation had become dire, and he could not care so much anymore.

He swiped his dagger against the rock wall with force.

“Chi!”

The sharp dagger dislodged Lava Soil instantly, but it was only half of it. Merlin did not have time to give it another go, so he could only store the harvested Lava Soil into his ring.

Merlin then proceeded to climb toward the volcanic crater hastily.

“Boom!”

Finally, the volcano erupted. The terrifying magma spewed out, and Merlin felt as though his entire body was about to be set ablaze. He mustered every ounce of energy in him, let out a loud yell, and fiercely propelled his own body toward the crater of the volcano.

“Swoosh!”

Merlin gave his all as he leaped out of the crater. Soon, he noticed Wizard Bayton who was in mid-air.

Wizard Bayton saw Merlin at the crater, delight appeared on his face. Nonetheless, he heard the roaring sounds of the volcano too and knew that if no action was to be taken, and even if Merlin escaped to the crater, he would still be burned to death by the sweltering lava.

In that moment, intense Wind elements emerged on Wizard Bayton’s body – it was his flying spell.

“Wizard Merlin, don’t move. I’ll try my best to get you out of there.”

Upon finishing his sentence, Wizard Bayton proceeded to cast a Wind-type spell. Immediately, a gust of strong wind hoisted Merlin into the air. It then carried him toward the vast sea with great speed.

Wizard Bayton’s Magic Power was extremely strong. However, to support Merlin’s weight, a staggeringly huge portion of his Magic Power was drained, and before long, it was completely exhausted.

That was also the reason why Wizard Bayton did not bring Merlin along to fly when they were departing from the Violet Flame Island. The Magic Power in Wizard Bayton’s body was not enough to support another person in the air with him.

In order to sweep Merlin up into the air, Wizard Bayton could only sacrifice and spend all his Magic Power. Even with that, it was only roughly sufficient to move Merlin to the sea near the beach.

“Boom!”

Wizard Bayton could not support him anymore, so Merlin was hurled straight into the sea. By now, the volcano had completely erupted. The sky was filled with smoke, and the entire small island was shaking slightly.

Merlin swam from the sea to the beach gradually. Though he was drenched wet, he still could not hide the delightful expression on his face. After all, he could be considered lucky to have cheated death. If not for Wizard Bayton, there was no way he could have escaped unscathed.

“Wizard Bayton, it’s really all thanks to you this time. Otherwise, my fate would’ve been sealed.”

Merlin said breathlessly.

Wizard Bayton landed on the beach from mid-air. The sight of the volcano which looked like it was roaring still struck fear in his heart. He gently shook his head and replied, “I think we better leave now, it’s too dangerous here.”

The volcanic eruption was appalling. Even a stronger Spell Caster would be stricken with fear.

“Right, we definitely need to leave here at once!”

Merlin nodded too. This nameless island was too perilous. Nobody could tell what kind of danger would happen following the volcanic eruption. Their safety would only be ensured by leaving the nameless island as soon as possible.

Thus, Merlin quickly sat on the little boat. With Wizard Bayton taking helm, they started departing from the nameless island.

The little boat gradually drifted away from the nameless island. From afar, only thick black smoke could be seen from the nameless island accompanied by growling sounds from the volcanic eruption that were spread by the wind.

“We’ve finally left, but this sea still remains dangerous. I can’t believe that a volcano which hasn’t erupted for several decades, chose to erupt today... Luckily, I still managed to obtain Lava Soil, so the journey wasn’t futile after all!”

A smile etched on Merlin's face. Although it was urgent back inside the volcano, and half of the Lava Soil was not retrieved in time, with the other half of Lava Soil that he currently possessed, it was already enough for him to cultivate the first stage of Pandora Demon Ability, Fuse Earth.

As soon as he finished cultivating the first stage of Pandora Demon Ability, Fuse Earth, Merlin's Earth-type defensive spells would then hugely improve.

"No way, Wizard Merlin. Look, what's that in the water?"

Just when Merlin was exhaling a long sigh of relief, awaiting his journey back to Fort Udon and finishing the cultivation of Pandora Demon Ability, Fuse Earth, Bayton seemed to have realized something, and his expressions changed.

Merlin's gaze followed Wizard Bayton's and shifted to the sea waters surrounding the little boat. Indeed, the sea waters were initially calm and peaceful but for no apparent reason, numerous bubbles started appearing. It was just like boiling water, bubbling one after another.

At that time, the little boat had already left for quite a distance from the nameless island. However, the surrounding sea waters had air bubbles emerging from the water surface.

"Be careful, the changes might be due to something in the water!"

Merlin immediately became vigilant. Such a strange phenomenon must be caused by unknown changes. Otherwise, there would not be a peculiar sighting like this at the vast sea region for no reason.

"Hum! Hum! Hum!"

Along with the bubbles, a huge whirlpool gradually formed on the calm sea. It was a large whirlpool, swirling up huge chunk of seawater, sweeping everything around it into the whirlpool.

Even Merlin and Wizard Bayton's little boat was sucked toward the whirlpool by its strong current.

"Not good. Quick, leave!"

Merlin reacted instinctively, jumping into the sea instantly, while Wizard Bayton immediately flew into mid-air. Just when he was about to distance himself from the whirlpool, it seemed as though a huge invisible hand emerged from within the whirlpool and captured Wizard Bayton.

“What in the world is this thing underneath the sea? Wizard Bayton, watch out!”

Merlin’s Mind Power seemed to have vaguely detected the invisible hand stretching from within the whirlpool. Yet, it did not bring any effects as the giant hand grabbed Wizard Bayton directly in mid-air, forcibly sucking Wizard Bayton into it.

“Wizard Bayton!”

Merlin could only watch as Wizard Bayton was swept into the whirlpool. In the blink of an eye, he was nowhere to be seen. It was feared that anything drawn inside such a terrifying whirlpool would only be shred into pieces.

Wizard Bayton had been dragged into the whirlpool, so he was most likely doomed.

Deep in his heart, Merlin felt grievously frustrated. He could not believe that having just escaped from a terrorizing volcanic eruption, they met with another accident and that Wizard Bayton had perished in the whirlpool.

He had no idea how the whirlpool was formed. It came out of the blue, and its destructive power was too horrifying. It was shocking to how it was able to grasp Wizard Bayton mid-air, sucking him into the whirlpool directly.

“Whoosh! Whoosh!”

Huge water column rose into the sky as the giant whirlpool became larger, drawing in everything in the vast sea. Merlin could even make out some big-sized sea beasts getting sucked into the whirlpool one by one, disappearing without a trace.

“Swoosh!”

At this moment, Merlin felt an eerie feeling, he felt like he was being watched by some unknown entity. Then, another invisible big hand extended from the whirlpool and directly grabbed Merlin.

“Oh no!”

Merlin had just witnessed this invisible big hand drag Wizard Bayton into the whirlpool.

It was his turn now.

“Pandora Demon Ability, Glacial Finger!”

Merlin reached out and pointed his finger, and the extremely cold air froze the sea waters in front of him into a layer of thick ice crystals. Even though the chill of the Glacial Ice Finger was great but when it came to this strange invisible big hand, it had no effect at all. The chill that permeated the air was crushed by the invisible hand.

Thereafter, the invisible hand grabbed Merlin fiercely, and he felt like he lost control of his movements. His entire body went stiff and was dragged directly into the huge whirlpool by the invisible hand.

“Swoosh!”

Merlin felt a strong pulling force as though it was tearing his body apart. Merlin had no resistance against the huge pulling force and was directly plunged into the sea by the whirlpool.

Chapter 282: The Flame Being

Merlin was swallowed by the whirlpool but without the strangulation that he imagined as he was not torn apart by the vortex. Instead, it felt like he had shuttled pass an endless distance, and it also seemed as if he was transported to a strange place in the blink of an eye.

“Eh? Even my robe is not wet?”

Merlin gradually regained consciousness. However, the first thing he felt was that there was not a single drop of water on his robe. Merlin remembered very clearly that the huge whirlpool was full of water columns, and he was sucked into it. How was it possible that there was not even a drop of water on him?

It was known that although Merlin had blue dolphin's bubble, he was already drawn into the whirlpool before he managed to use it, and he fainted thereafter. As to how he got here, there was no memory of it at all.

"Wizard Merlin, you're awake too?"

Just as Merlin was trying to figure things out, he heard a familiar voice. Merlin turned his head and there was immediately a smile on his face.

"Wizard Bayton, you're alright!"

The person beside Merlin was Wizard Bayton who was sucked into the whirlpool earlier. Merlin thought that Wizard Bayton had already been wrung to death by the whirlpool, but did not expect that Wizard Bayton would survive too.

However, Wizard Bayton's look was very solemn. With a low voice, he said, "Wizard Merlin, though we're not dead, the situation is very unfavorable for us. Can you take a look at what's around you?"

Seeing such a solemn expression on Wizard Bayton's face, Merlin stood up slowly and began to look around.

Merlin saw that they were in a huge transparent bubble, but the bubble seemed to be very solid, without any trace of cracks. Outside the bubble was only pitch darkness, with occasional sightings of seaweed. This indicated that they were at the bottom of the sea.

The interior of this huge bubble was magnificent, surrounded by transparent glass, inlaid with innumerable jewels with a hint of white light.

It was exactly because of the existence of these unique jewels that the interior of the bubble appeared bright as daylight.

"What in the world is this place?"

Merlin was also puzzled, but there was more of a feeling of shock in his heart. In such a deep seabed, he was still able to walk freely, not feeling even the slightest hydraulic pressure inside. This was already beyond the capabilities of ordinary people.

Wizard Bayton indulged for a moment, his eyes showed a hint of surprise, and whispered, "If I'm not wrong, this should be a relic in the bottom of the sea! In the vast sea, there are endless hidden secrets buried within. Some Spell Casters had been accidentally swallowed into the stomach of sea beast. Fortunately, they did not die, but they did get hold of some powerful spell casting tools in the belly of the sea beast. From there on, they leapfrogged to become powerful Spell Casters.

"Some of the Spell Casters used blue dolphin's bubble to dive into the deep seas, occasionally discovering some dilapidated ancient monuments, and also retrieved some treasures from them.

"This place, in all likelihood, is an ancient monument left behind by a powerful Spell Caster, and it is so well preserved. It has drifted to the bottom of the sea for who knows how many years. Wizard Merlin, if this really is an ancient monument, then we're really lucky!"

Wizard Bayton's words made Merlin recall some rumors about ancient monuments. Merlin was no stranger to ancient monuments. Back then, it was exactly because he entered an ancient monument that he had found the cultivation method for Fiery Collapse.

However, it was too unusual to leave an ancient monument at the bottom of the sea. In addition, Spell Casters generally do not have the power to leave ancient monuments on the seabed.

In all likelihood, this huge bubble was an unimaginably powerful alchemy product. It was rumored that back in the Molta Empire, the most glorious era for Spell Casters, the alchemy products produced by some powerful Spell Casters held magical powers beyond imagination. Perhaps this is a similar alchemy product.

"The whirlpool on the surface of the sea must have been created by this huge bubble. It's just that why did it bring us here?"

Merlin did not seem too excited even if he knew that this was an ancient monument. Entering ancient monuments did not guarantee the reward of treasures. On the contrary, ancient monuments were full of dangers.

"Wizard Bayton, have you tried breaking this layer of bubbles?"

Merlin looked at the huge bubble outside and asked in a low voice.

“Break this bubble? I’m afraid that will be difficult. However, if it could really be broken, then we must also be prepared. Once the bubble bursts, we’ll bear the horrific pressure of the seabed.”

Wizard Bayton immediately understood what Merlin meant. The ancient monument should be a lesser priority. The most important thing was to be able to return to the surface of the sea, back to Fort Udon.

“Wizard Bayton, do you have a blue dolphin’s bubble?”

“I am, in fact, preparing a blue dolphin’s bubble. Let me get ready, once the bubble bursts, we’ll immediately move inside the blue dolphin’s bubble.”

Wizard Bayton’s face gradually became solemn.

Merlin nodded, then took a deep breath. He also braced himself to release the blue dolphin’s bubble when the time came, thus intense elemental fluctuations immediately appeared on his body.

“Pandora Demon Ability, Glacial Finger!”

Merlin reached out and pointed his finger, a gush of cold air surged out. However, when it touched the bubble layer, it did not have any effect, and it dissipated instantly.

It was the first time that Merlin had encountered this situation. This seemingly soft bubble layer was indeed tricky.

“Pandora Demon Ability, Fiery Collapse!”

At this moment, Merlin could not bother that Wizard Bayton was beside him, and he pulled off another Pandora Demon Ability, Fiery Collapse!

Suddenly, the blazing fire started burning, and the pale flame exuded a heart-rending high temperature.

Wizard Bayton's gaze froze slightly. Watching Merlin cast two types of Pandora Demon Abilities in succession, he could not help but changed his expression slightly, feeling appalled deep inside.

He knew Pandora Demon Abilities. They were an absolute secret whether in Fort Udon or in some spell casters' organizations, and only the most powerful Spell Casters could obtain them.

It was considered very lucky to get one Pandora Demon Ability, let alone two Pandora Demon Abilities. Although Wizard Bayton did not know the true origin of Merlin, he could feel that Merlin was not a simple being – he was definitely not some roaming Wizard.

At this time, Merlin was concentrating on observing the condition of his Fiery Collapse. He found that no matter how the flame from Fiery Collapse burned, there was no change at all to the huge bubble.

Subsequently, Merlin did not continue casting Fiery Collapse. He knew that no matter how he attacked, he could not break the bubble layer.

“Wizard Bayton, the bubble can't be broken. If we intend to leave, I'm afraid we have to continue further inside.”

Merlin glanced at Wizard Bayton and then set his gaze on the large door in front. Obviously, if this was an ancient monument, then they must follow the path of the ancient monument venturing deep inside for any hopes of leaving.

“Yes, no matter what's inside, we have to give it a try. Maybe it's a blessing and not a curse?”

Wizard Bayton was full of curiosity about the mysterious monument as the eager look on his face gave this away.

Soon, Merlin and Wizard Bayton went straight to the front door. The two looked at each other. They prepared themselves, kept fully vigilant, and then with force, they yanked the door open together.

“Creak-”

This door did not look heavy but it required a great force to push it open.

Once the door opened, there was a huge and spacious room inside. There was no other decoration in the room. Instead, the walls were engraved with mysterious runes.

“At last someone came... Oh, there’s two. Hehe, but you two are too weak. Back then, even a Seventh-level Spell Caster had been here but he failed in the end. He was banished into the flame cage and eventually burnt to ashes.”

Suddenly, there was a voice in the spacious room.

Merlin and Wizard Bayton were petrified and frantically searched around for the source of the voice, but after looking for a while, they did not find anyone.

“No need to look, I’m right in front of you!”

The mysterious voice appeared again. Following that, traces of flames appeared and began gathering quickly out of thin air, eventually forming a human figure.

The “Flame Being” floated in the air, then gently extended his hand. Suddenly, several flames rapidly split up and again formed the same “Flame Being”. The situation was very peculiar.

“Who are you? What’s this place?”

Both Merlin and Wizard Bayton looked at each other, forcing a calm look on their faces and asked.

“You can call me Tinder. As for where this is, you’ll naturally know when you have passed the three levels left by the master.”

The strange “Flame Being” spoke again.

“Three levels? What if we don’t do it?”

Wizard Bayton said after a ponder.

“Don’t do it?”

The mysterious flame seemed to have laughed. The voice soon became sharper, “It wouldn’t matter if you don’t do it. Your lives are not that long anyway, just a few hundred years, just wait to die here.”

After a long time, Merlin slowly opened his mouth and said, “You’re the one who pulled us here?”

“Yes, every 100 years, I’ll pull some Spell Casters here. There’s almost no one who succeeded, but there are also people like you who refuse to attempt the levels, thus they can only wait silently for their own deaths. Even a Master Wizard could not force an exit out of here, much less pinpoint the location of this place. Which is why you two shouldn’t have any expectations that a powerful Spell Caster will come here and save you.”

The Flame Being’s voice was very awkward. It seemed that he was not speaking at all, and sounded really weird.

However, Merlin and Wizard Bayton had understood what the Flame Being meant. This huge bubble was definitely left behind by a powerful Spell Caster. Even a Master Wizard could not find this place, which also indirectly signified the great power of this monument’s owner.

“Well, that’s about all you could ask, so will you be attempting the levels or not?”

The Flame Being looked a little impatient and asked coldly.

Merlin and Wizard Bayton looked at each other and shook their heads slightly. “Do we have a choice? Not attempting means waiting for our deaths!”

Hearing that Merlin and Wizard Bayton agreed to attempt the three levels, the Flame Being’s temperament became clearly more at ease. Initially, there were several Flame Beings but these flame being then quickly merged together, with only two of them left, each standing in front of Merlin and Wizard Bayton respectively.

Chapter 283: Mirror Image

The Flame Being divided into two figures, each standing in front of Merlin and Wizard Bayton respectively.

“Actually, Master is still very benevolent. For each obstacle, you’re given three chances to attempt. If you feel that you’re beaten or you admit defeat, then you’ll not be in danger.”

The Flame Being said slowly.

“There’s such a rule?”

Merlin thought of it carefully. Indeed, if there were three chances and one was allowed to admit defeat at any time, the Flame Being’s master was indeed considered “benevolent”. Back when Merlin entered the ancient tower monument, if he was defeated when facing the guard, he would die. There were no three chances at all.

“If we fail to clear the obstacle after three tries, what’ll happen?”

“After failing thrice, if you survive the gate guardian’s attack, you’ll be thrown into the Flame Prison... Maybe there’s still a chance to live in the Flame Prison, but I advise you not to have such a thought. The torture in the Flame Prison, hehe, is not something you can imagine. Every Spell Caster who held the good-fortune mentality upon entering the Flame Prison ended remorseful eventually. They would rather die in the hands of the gate guardian.”

This was already the second time Merlin had heard the Flame Being mention “Flame Prison”. It was certainly not a good place. Since it was a prison, there would only be inhumane torture.

After clarifying his doubts, Merlin took a deep breath and said to Wizard Bayton, “Wizard Bayton, which one of us is going first?”

Wizard Bayton smiled and said, “My powers are not as strong as yours, so let me go first. You should take a good look at this first obstacle, see what’s so powerful about it.”

After his statement, Wizard Bayton took a step forward and said to the Flame Being, “Come on, I’ll go first!”

The Flame Being nodded and said, “There’s one more thing I want to remind you. If you’ve not constructed Fire-type spells even if you’ve cleared all three obstacles, you will not be able to choose the most prized treasure left by the Master. You’d only be able to choose from some lower grade treasures.”

Merlin nodded thoughtfully. In fact, he had already guessed the reason. The Flame Being’s master must be a Spell Caster with very prestigious achievements in Fire-type spells. The most precious treasure left by him will naturally only be obtained by Fire-type Wizards.

However, both Merlin and Wizard Bayton had constructed Fire-type spells. If they were lucky enough to clear all three obstacles, they would obtain the most precious treasures in the ancient monument.

After the Flame Being finished speaking, he waved his hand slightly. Suddenly, the figure of the Flame Being in front of Wizard Bayton began to twist and change gradually.

In the end, the Flame Being had surprisingly transformed into a mirror image of Wizard Bayton, but his expression was a little cold.

“This...”

Both Merlin and Wizard Bayton were astonished. The “Wizard Bayton” opposite of them, who had transformed from the Flame Being, even had the same body scent as the original.

The other Flame Being said quietly, “This is your first obstacle – mirror image opponents! This is to simulate your own real strength, but in terms of spell control, it has almost reached the peak. No matter what methods you use, you must defeat your mirror image! May I remind you that it’s best not to use casting tools because whatever casting tool you have, your mirror image will also have the same. Ok, let’s get started!”

As the voice of the Flame Being fell, suddenly, the mirror image opposite to him made its first move, casting a flying spell. Its speed was upped significantly and it hastily dashed toward Wizard Bayton.

At the same time, a sky full of flames descended from above. This was a Fourth-level spell, which directly swarmed on Wizard Bayton while the real Wizard Bayton was merely casting a defensive spell.

“Such stunning speed. The control of the spells has almost reached the peak, and the coordination between each spell and even the position is well calculated. This... This can’t be beaten. Wizard Bayton is in danger!”

Merlin saw the mirror image opponent of Wizard Bayton – its ever-changing figure, and almost oppressing Wizard Bayton all the time, thus Merlin knew that Wizard Bayton could not clear the first obstacle.

“Ka-chak!”

In the face of the mirror image opponent’s violent attack, there was almost no gap for a respite. Like a violent storm, Wizard Bayton defense spells finally could not hold its attack off, and instantly shattered.

At this time, Wizard Bayton could no longer resist, and he had to shout frantically, “Surrender, I admit defeat!”

Following Wizard Bayton’s voluntary surrender, his mirror image opponent instantly turned into a blaze of flame and re-entered the Flame Being’s body.

“Too weak, too damn weak. Although you still have two chances, it’s basically impossible to get through the first obstacle.”

The Flame Being saw Wizard Bayton’s performance and shook his head in disappointment.

Wizard Bayton was indeed very powerful. However, in the face of a Wizard who was almost exactly like him, and who possessed much higher skill than him in terms of spell manipulation and various combat methods, Wizard Bayton’s defeat was reasonable.

Even Merlin who had been watching the entire battle unfold felt his heart shudder. If his image was also like that, then he would surely not clear the first obstacle too.

“Alright, it’s your turn!”

The Flame Being's gaze shifted to Merlin.

Merlin took a deep breath, there was no escape to this kind of battle. Success or failure would only be known after the battle.

Thus, Merlin walked a few steps forward and said, "Let's get started!"

The Flame Being nodded. A flame quickly flew out from his body. Then, Merlin felt an irresistible invisible force as if his entire body was probed all over.

Thereafter, the flame that had floated from the Flame Being's body began to take on a form gradually, faintly changing into Merlin's appearance. Having seen the mirror image of Wizard Bayton earlier, Merlin was no longer surprised, but to look at a person who was exactly the same as him – it was still a strange feeling.

"Oh? Not right, hold on!"

Suddenly, there was a gasp from the Flame Being's voice. It turned out that the flame was actually changing dramatically, but it could never change into the appearance of Merlin.

The Flame Being's eyes stared at Merlin for a moment, then he smiled and said, "Turns out that you're powerful though you're merely a First-level Spell Caster. At best, you've only constructed two Second-level spells, yet you have two Pandora Demon Abilities, and even a Six-Elemental Spell Caster! Not only that, your body seems to be far stronger than any average Spell Caster, almost comparable to some powerful elemental swordsmen. It's no surprise that your mirror image expends so much Magic Power..."

After the Flame Being had finished, he then separated another part of the flame from the body and incorporated it into the mirror image of Merlin. With the integration of this flame, Merlin's mirror image quickly took shape, and it became exactly the same as Merlin, even with the same breath...

Merlin's eyes narrowed slightly, and deep down, he was secretly surprised. With only one glance at him, the Flame Being could understand his situation so thoroughly.

The two kinds of Pandora Demon Abilities naturally referred to Fiery Collapse and Glacial Finger, and a strong physique, which was one of Merlin's most well-hidden secrets was thoroughly exposed by the Flame Being.

However, there were still several aspects that the flame being did not see through. In addition to Fiery Collapse and Glacial Finger, Merlin had another Pandora Demon Ability – Darkness Heart, which had been integrated into his spells.

Darkness Heart was dissimilar to Fiery Collapse and Glacial Finger. It had been completely integrated into the spells, so it seemed hidden. Earlier, the Flame Being only mentioned Fiery Collapse and Glacial Finger, which meant it was very likely he had not realized Merlin's Darkness Heart.

As for the mirror image opposite him, it may have also copied Fiery Collapse and Glacial Finger, but whether or not Darkness Heart had been mirrored, Merlin would need to find out.

“Let's begin!”

The Flame Being waved, and Merlin's mirror image immediately cast Wind of Freedom, and his figure immediately became erratic.

“Ka-chak!”

Meanwhile, Merlin's first move was to cast Glacial Finger, but it missed because it could not capture the figure of the mirror image. Then, when Merlin was just about to cast Fiery Collapse, he sensed an imminent danger...

“Wind of Freedom!”

Merlin did not hesitate for a second and immediately dodged to the side.

“Swoosh!”

A chill, like a sharp arrow, flew straight at Merlin, which made him break into a cold sweat. His mirror image's control of spells and Pandora Demon Abilities in addition to the coordination between both was far superior to Merlin.

“No way, if it keeps on like this, I'll lose sooner or later!”

Merlin finally realized how Wizard Bayton felt earlier. Fighting with one's own image was very arduous, with even a feeling of grievance as if one could never defeat the mirror image.

In fact, without overwhelming talent or some other slick means, it was near impossible to beat the mirror image. This first obstacle alone had impeded who knew how many Spell Casters before them.

“Going head-on with the mirror image won't work! However, if you want to defeat the mirror image, it's not that there's no chance at all. The opponent has Fiery Collapse and Glacial Finger with Mind Power equivalent to mine, a Third-level Mind Power. One thing is within my expectation, the opponent indeed doesn't have Darkness Heart!”

Merlin had now confirmed that the mirror image did not have Darkness Heart. Nobody knew why but this was the only chance for Merlin.

If he desired to fight head-on with the mirror image, Merlin had not yet reached the point of seamless manipulation of spells without any mistakes. However, his mirror image seemed capable of not producing any mistakes, so Merlin simply had no chance of winning if he went head-on.

Only by luck or by “seizing opportunities” could he defeat the mirror image!

“Darkness Tide!”

Merlin stopped evading the mirror image's attack, and then cast the Second-level spell, Darkness Tide.

Suddenly, darkness descended and enveloped the entire room – the bright room immediately became pitch-dark. After being enhanced by Darkness Heart, it was easy for Merlin's Darkness Tide to drag any Fourth-level Spell Caster into a realm of illusion.

Merlin's mirror image only had Third-level Mind Power. The opponent had not duplicated Darkness Heart, hence it did not have any resistance to Darkness-type spells.

Therefore, when a space of Darkness-type elements enveloped the room, Merlin's mirror image naturally fell into the illusion.

“Pandora Demon Ability, Glacial Finger!”

In the darkness, Merlin’s voice was heard, and in an instant, Merlin’s mirror image was immediately frozen. Layers of ice crystals wrapped Merlin’s mirror image.

“Ka-chak!”

The ice crystals began to shatter, and Merlin’s mirror image was reduced to countless pieces, falling onto the ground. Then glints of star-shaped flames appeared on the ground, which gathered together and floated back into the Flame Being’s body.

“Congratulations, you’ve cleared the first obstacle!”

The Flame Being’s voice was calm, but his eyes were ablaze and focused intently on Merlin.

Chapter 284: The Second Obstacle

“You’ve passed!”

Merlin heaved a slight sigh of relief. Him passing the obstacle this time was indeed kind of an opportunistic event. The Flame Being did not mirror Merlin’s Darkness Heart, which allowed Merlin to utilize the enhancing effects of Darkness Heart on Darkness-type spells to pass the first obstacle.

This also showed that the simulation ability of the first obstacle was not perfect. At least, Merlin’s Darkness Heart and his enhanced spells could not be replicated.

The Flame Being’s eyes were scorching hot as he scanned Merlin intensely. Then he said with a calm voice, “Yes, although you’re suspected of ingenuity, this first obstacle was never originally intended for an average Spell Caster. If I’m not mistaken, your Darkness Tide was only a Second-level spell, yet it has such immense power. You must’ve cultivated Darkness Heart, right? Only Pandora Demon Abilities that were integrated into spells can’t be replicated.”

Merlin did not answer, assuming that to be the truth.

“Alright, let’s go. You’ve passed the first obstacle, but there are two more obstacles awaiting you next!”

The Flame Being said as he stared at Merlin.

Meanwhile, Merlin took a glance at Wizard Bayton right next to him. There was no way that the other person could pass the first obstacle. Leaving him there was undoubtedly like sending him to his death.

After a moment of thoughts, Merlin looked up and asked the Flame Being, “If I’ve passed all three obstacles, can you let Wizard Bayton leave?”

“Leave? Heh heh. I can only tell you that there’s such hope, but only if you can get through all three obstacles!”

Although the Flame Being did not answer directly, he had indirectly revealed a trace of information. As long as Merlin passed the three obstacles, then it was also possible for Wizard Bayton to leave safely.

On that thought, Merlin said to Wizard Bayton, “Wizard Bayton, wait quietly here, don’t attempt the obstacles again.”

Wizard Bayton nodded, a hopeful look appeared on his face. He smiled and said, “Wizard Merlin, go ahead, I believe you can surely pass all three obstacles!”

After a few reminders, Merlin proceeded to follow the Flame Being, gradually leaving the room. He reentered the long corridor, and then reached another dimmed stone room.

This stone room was very dry and had a foul smell of dust in the air. It seemed that no one had come in for a long time.

There were some flame totems in the dry stone room. These flame totems were vivid and looked like they could be ignited.

“Well, here’s the second obstacle!”

The Flame Being proclaimed slowly after he brought Merlin to the stone room.

“This is the second obstacle? Where’s the guardian?”

Merlin searched around for a moment but did not see any guardian.

“Guardian? The second obstacle doesn’t have a guardian. You only need to remain in this stone room for half an hour. Blazing flames will be ignited from these flame totems. You can use spells or even Pandora Demon Abilities, but you can’t use Defensive-type casting tools, so you have to take off that two robes on you.”

The Flame Being simply introduced the rules of this second obstacle, which involved surviving the scorching flames within the room.

After seeing the rules of the second obstacle, Merlin’s mind was even more certain that the owner of this ancient monument must have very high attainment in Fire-type spells. This endurance of burning flames was very likely a test.

Although Merlin had constructed Fire-type spells and even Fire-type Pandora Demon Abilities, he had no idea if he could withstand the scorching flames.

Nevertheless, since he had arrived at the second obstacle, Merlin wanted to attempt it anyway.

“Come on, second obstacle, I’m ready!”

Merlin said to the Flame Being with a serious expression.

The Flame Being nodded and then swung his hand forcefully, and the door of the stone room was immediately sealed.

“Let’s begin, flame totems!”

As the voice of the Flame Being fell, the temperature of the entire stone chamber rose rapidly. The vivid flame totems on the surrounding walls seemed to have “come to life”. Streaks of flames began floating out of the flame totems, spreading into the entire stone room.

Merlin took a deep breath and immediately cast the Second-level Earth-type spell, Earth Veil. He was also ready to unleash Glacial Finger at any moment

Before long, the flames enveloped Merlin and his Earth Veil was pierced instantly when met with these flames.

Moreover, Merlin tried to release Frigid Ice, but it was instantly evaporated by the flames before it could condense into ice crystals. The strength of these flames seemed to be more terrifying than Merlin’s Fiery Collapse.

“Pandora Demon Ability, Glacial Finger!”

As Merlin unleashed Glacial Finger, the frost could freeze some of the flames, but soon, a large blaze of flames would sweep through and melt the ice crystals completely.

“Even Glacial Finger has no effect!”

Merlin inhaled sharply. He did not intend to unravel the secret of the flames at all. He was only a First-level Spell Caster. How could he comprehend the profound mystery of the flames? Even those Seventh-level Spell Casters would not understand the enigma of the elements.

Perhaps, only those Great Wizard would comprehend the mysteries of the elements. This second obstacle which was set by the Spell Caster who left behind this ancient monument, served no effect at all, according to Merlin’s perspective.

In the beginning, it was able to stop most Spell Casters who wanted to pass the obstacle.

Merlin had never thought of understanding the secret of the flames. He just wanted to see if spells and Pandora Demon Abilities could be used to resist the burning flames, but now it seemed that it would not work. He was unable to resist the scorching flames. If he let the flames near his body, he would be incinerated to ashes in an instant.

“I surrender!”

Merlin did not show any hesitation and admitted defeat. He had three chances to get through the obstacle, so naturally, he would not want to die in vain.

As Merlin’s voice fell, suddenly, the surrounding flames quickly dissipated, and the temperature of the entire stone chamber dropped rapidly, returning to normal in no time.

“Failed? It’s only the first try. You’ve two more chances!”

The Flame Being’s voice rang again. He seemed to have predicted that Merlin would fail.

Merlin frowned, and asked in a deep voice, “The flames of the second obstacle – I’m afraid that’s not only a Fourth-level spell right? It’s even stronger than my fiery Collapse!”

Merlin’s Fiery Collapse was the most powerful spell which could match that of a Fourth-level spell. Same as Glacial Finger but it had no effect on the flames in the stone room. Those flames were even more powerful than Fiery Collapse, which brought Merlin to his question.

“It’s no big deal if I reveal it to you. The flames in the second obstacle are completely simulated from the powers of flames from Fifth-level spells. Your two Pandoras Demon Abilities, no, it should be three Pandora Demon Abilities, won’t have any effect.”

The Flame Being did not keep it a secret, explaining the flames in the stone room briefly.

“What? Simulation of flames from Fifth-level spells? The usage of casting tools is even prohibited. With spells alone, even with additional Pandora Demon Abilities, I’m only at the first stage. At best, I can only match the peak of Fourth-level spells. How am I supposed to resist these flames?”

When Merlin heard that the flames were all comparable to Fifth-level spells, he knew that he could not resist it no matter what. Not only him, but he was certain that most Spell Casters would not be able to resist it too.

On the other hand, the Flame Being seemed calm as he slowly said, “Your strength is comparable to a Fourth-level Spell Caster, so the flames of the second obstacle are a Fifth-level spell. If you have the strength of a Third-level Spell Caster, then the flames will only have the power of Fourth-level

spells. Some Fourth-level Spell Casters have Pandora Demon Abilities, and can even cultivate until the second stage, so this second obstacle will be relatively easy for them. However, Spell Casters like that, in all these years, not even one of them have been here. So far, there are only three people who were able to get through the second obstacle!”

“Three people?”

Merlin’s face was solemn, and his emotions gradually calmed down. If the second obstacle was easier than the first obstacle, how could it be called the second obstacle then?

Just as the Flame Being mentioned, this second obstacle was not considered difficult. If there was a Fourth-level Spell Caster who happened to have cultivated a Second-level Defensive-type of Pandora Demon Ability, staying in the room for half an hour would really be a piece of cake.

However, such Spell Casters were too scarce. The Flame Being also said that in such a long period of time, he had never seen even one of these Spell Casters.

There were already three people who passed the second obstacle. Although there was only a handful of them, still, three of them had gotten through the second obstacle. This also showed that the second obstacle was not completely impossible to pass.

If one desired to understand the mystery of the flames, it was virtually impossible. Merlin also believed that the three people who had passed the second obstacle definitely did not do so by comprehending the enigma within the flames, but had other methods instead.

Merlin thought for a moment and asked the Flame Being, “Has there been a Seventh-level Spell Caster here? How did they get through the first and second obstacles?”

The Flame Being looked calmly at Merlin and then replied, “Not bad that you can think of this. You’re much smarter than those other halfwit Spell Casters. Of those who passed the second obstacle, there was indeed one Seventh-level Spell Caster, but the first and second obstacles for Seventh-level Spell Casters were completely different.”

Though the Flame Being did not explain clearly, Merlin had faintly guessed that this place could sadly be the same as Bell Space, which also had limits.

The limit would be Seventh-level Spell Casters. For the first obstacle, it would be difficult to replicate a Seventh-level Spell Caster, perhaps, it could not be replicated at all. It was because every Seventh-level spell was constructed personally by the Spell Caster and was exclusively unique. Copying that would be way too difficult.

“Well then, you’ve asked enough questions. This second obstacle has impeded most Spell Casters. If you can’t get through it, you can only stay here forever. Look, those skeletons belonged to those Spell Casters who were previously trapped in this second obstacle.”

The Flame Being pointed to a corner outside the stone room, where there were countless skeletons piled up. They looked frightening. They were all Spell Casters who were trapped in the second obstacle.

Merlin took a glance at the Flame Being, then took a deep breath and said with a low voice, “Actually, it’s not entirely impossible to get through the second obstacle!”

At this moment, a relaxed smile was displayed on Merlin’s face, and his expression seemed to reveal a hint of confidence.

Chapter 285: Pandora Demon Ability, Fuse Earth!

“Hmm, you look confident. Do you have a way of getting through the second level?”

The Flame Being noticed the confident smile on Merlin’s face and asked in an unconvinced tone. In the eyes of the Flame Being, Merlin had no hope of passing the second level whatsoever.

“A way? Of course, I do!”

Merlin did not say much, instead, he immediately sat cross-legged in the stone room. The Flame Being seemed to be very curious too. He did not leave this time around and opted to watch Merlin from the side.

Merlin did not seem to bother as his hand turned slightly, and a mass of soft red soil with a fiery-red hue appeared in his hands.

This was Lava Soil which Merlin had obtained in his previous narrow escape from the volcano.

To get through the second level, Merlin naturally could not withstand the Essence of Fire that could match a Fifth-level spell. Passing this level seemed to be impossible for almost everyone.

Therefore, one could only take advantage of the odds in order to pass it. Merlin only needed to persevere in the flames for half an hour. It was virtually impossible for him to hold for half an hour in the Fifth-level spell with Earth Veil, a mere Second-level spell.

However, if he possessed Pandora Demon Ability, Fuse Earth, and thoroughly integrated it into Earth Veil, things would be completely different. At that time, the defensive power of Earth Veil would be elevated innumerable, thus providing hopes of remaining in the ferociously burning flames for half an hour.

“It’s not difficult to cultivate Pandora Demon Ability, Fuse Earth, but it’ll take some time.”

The only thing that Merlin was not lacking now was time. It was also quite safe here. Even Great Wizards would not possibly target this ancient monument, so it was naturally the safest place at the moment.

Hence, Merlin immediately began cultivating Pandora Demon Ability, Fuse Earth. He began to engrave a mysterious fire-red imprint and then forced Mind Power into the fire-red imprint as if Merlin knew Spell Models in the sea, and had a special connection with this fire-red imprint.

This was the first step in the cultivation of Pandora Demon Abilities, and the subsequent steps were to slowly begin absorbing Lava Soil into the imprint, which would require a long time.

One day, two days, ten days... Half a month later, Merlin’s entire body trembled. Only a small amount of Lava Soil was left in his hand, and the fire-red imprint on Merlin’s body began to slowly dissipate, and eventually disappeared completely.

“Success!”

Merlin opened his eyes and felt a peculiar feeling course through his body. He could clearly feel the existence of Pandora Demon Ability, Fuse Earth, indicating that he had succeeded in cultivating Fuse Earth.

“Earth Veil!”

Merlin promptly cast the Second-level Earth-type Defensive spell. In an instant, there was a thin khaki light veil around him, which was Earth Veil.

Compared with the previous Earth Veil, Merlin could clearly feel that Pandora Demon Ability, Fuse Earth had been fully integrated with Earth Veil as he could feel an immensely powerful force radiating from himself!

“Glacial Finger!”

Merlin thought for a moment, then decided to cast Glacial Finger onto himself. Traces of cold chill instantly froze Merlin all over.

“Ka-chak!”

However, the chill could only freeze the light veil layer on the surface of Merlin’s body, and with the fragmentation of the ice crystals, there was no change to Merlin’s Earth Veil.

Initially, the power of Glacial Finger could rival the peak of Fourth-level spells, but now, it could not do anything to Earth Veil. This showed that Merlin’s Earth Veil had undergone an enhancement thanks to Pandora Demon Ability, Fuse Earth. The strength of its defensive powers could even compare to Fifth-level spells.

The enhancement granted by Pandora Demon Ability, Fuse Earth to spells was not as powerful as Darkness Heart. However, Darkness Heart could only be integrated into spells when one became a Fourth-level Spell Caster.

On another note, there was no such limitation for Pandora Demon Ability, Fuse Earth. As long as it was an Earth-type Defensive spell, it could be merged with Fuse Earth and the power of the spell would be significantly improved.

Therefore, even though Merlin only released an ordinary Earth Veil, after the enhancement of Pandora Demon Ability, Fuse Earth, it would reach the strength of Fifth-level spells.

Feeling the power of this light veil on the surface of his body, Merlin also seemed to understand why it was cited in some ancient literature that in the most glorious era of Spell Casters, those truly powerful Pandora Demon Abilities could all be integrated into spells.

As for those ancient Spell Casters, spells released from even the simplest of gestures could have horrible destructive powers, these spells turned out to be reliant on Pandora Demon Abilities which could be integrated into their ordinary spells.

In fact, those ancient Spell Casters did not exclusively study spells but cultivated spells and Pandora Demon Abilities together. With the two forces complementing one another, even a First-level Spell Caster could be considered powerful.

“Does it mean that only Spell Casters who integrated Pandora Demon Abilities are real Spell Casters?”

A bold thought suddenly flashed across Merlin’s mind. The ancient Spell Caster system had been passed down for a long time, but the Molta Empire three thousand and six hundred years ago was undoubtedly the most glorious era of Spell Casters, almost reaching the peak.

However, with the abrupt collapse of the Molta Empire three thousand and six hundred years ago, many of the Spell Casters’ heritage seemed to have disappeared, and Pandora Demon Abilities had become a rare treasure. Countless alchemy, and even spell construction knowledge had presented a wide gap of inheritance.

Many truths had been drowned in the long river of history. The difference between a current Spell Caster’s strength from the First to the Ninth levels seemed to be too wide compared to that of the ancient Spell Casters vaguely mentioned in ancient literature.

Some ancient Spell Casters, even if they were only First-level Spell Casters, could kill countless powerful monsters alone, and even conquered the endless vast ocean.

However, on the Kurdmansla Islands, when faced with some low-level sea beasts, many Spell Casters could not even cope with them, which formed a stark contrast to ancient Spell Casters.

With the fusion of Pandora Demon Abilities into spells, the Spell Caster’s strength would vary greatly, and it would increase by a few folds. Each Spell Caster would be capable of wiping out an army of powerful sea beasts.

Therefore, Merlin's mind had produced these bold thoughts. Perhaps the ancient Spell Casters cultivated spells together with Pandora Demon Abilities, and those were the real Spell Casters!

This was merely Merlin's speculation. The overnight collapse of Molta Empire three thousand and six hundred years ago seemed to have buried countless secrets. To figure out these secrets, one must first figure out what happened to the Molta Empire back then.

Merlin took a deep breath and then stood up, pushing aside the flight of thoughts in his mind. The most important thing now was to get through the second level.

"I want to attempt the level again!"

Merlin said to the Flame Being.

The Flame Being floated in mid-air. He noticed that Merlin's eyes looked a bit complicated, and he suddenly said, "Oh, the lucky one, you've constructed another Pandora Demon Ability in the past ten days or so, right? However, the second level is no easy game. Are you sure you want to continue?"

Merlin ignored the Flame Being and answered with a firm tone, "Let's begin!"

The Flame Being nodded, then closed the door of the stone room. The flame totems on the surrounding walls seemed to come "alive" again and began letting out traces of flame.

The temperature of the entire stone room got higher and higher, and Merlin took a deep breath. He may be very confident about Pandora Demon Ability, Fuse Earth, but whether or not he could hold on for half an hour, he still had to try to find out.

"Earth Veil!"

Merlin stood in the stone room, and instantly a thin layer of khaki light veil appeared on the surface of his body.

"Chi... Chi... Chi..."

The flames kept burning, and Merlin could clearly feel the raging flame constantly consuming his Earth Veil. The layer of khaki light veil was also reduced little by little, and then the light veil began to lose its stability.

Merlin knew that his Earth Veil could only match Fifth-level spells, and the flames in the stone room also had the power of Fifth-level spells. Not to mention that there was a huge amount of flames surrounding him for a long time, naturally, he would not be able to resist it.

However, Merlin did not expect to be able to hold on for half an hour with a single cast of Earth Veil. Therefore, watching the light veil begin to dissipate completely, he cast Earth Veil once again.

One time, two times, three times...

At this moment, Merlin had also released an enhanced version of Earth Veil, and the defensive capability had seemingly increased as the amount of time before it would begin to dissipate had now stretched out much longer. However, the flame in the stone room was powerful. Its intensity alone made Merlin feel like he could not hold on anymore.

Fortunately, it was only half an hour. After half an hour, the flame in the stone room instantly disappeared, and the temperature quickly returned to normal.

The Flame Being had been watching Merlin all along. After seeing the flame disappear, Merlin was still standing in the same place, only his face was slightly faint and pale. There were no damages to him at all.

“You’ve actually passed...”

The Flame Being was a little moved. This was the fourth Spell Caster who had passed the second level in three thousand and six hundred years!

With elemental crystal stones, Merlin quickly recovered some of his Magic Power and then looked at the Flame Being. He smiled as he asked, “This means I’ve passed the second level, right?”

“Of course you’ve passed! Yes, you’re the fourth Spell Caster who passed the second obstacle with the last one getting through three thousand and six hundred years ago. You really do have great

potential. Now you're still a First-level Spell Caster. If you can concentrate your cultivation here for several decades cultivating until the Fourth-level, Fifth-level or even the Sixth-level, perhaps you have hope of getting through the third level."

There was a slight change in the Flame Being's tone where Merlin sensed it sharply. It seemed that the Flame Being had a slight expectation of Merlin.

"It takes decades? And one must cultivate until they become a Fifth-level or Sixth-level Spell Caster?"

Merlin's eyes froze slightly, listening to the Flame Being. It seemed that this third level, which was also the final level, simply could not be overcome with his current strength.

Was the third level really so difficult?

As if seeing through Merlin's doubts, the Flame Being sneered. "Heh heh, how can the third level set by Master be easy for an average Spell Caster? Before you, three people had already reached the third level. However, none of them could pass, and their potential was no lower than yours.

"There was even one person, who possessed five types of Pandora Demon Abilities, all of which could be integrated into spells, but even such a genius could not pass the last level. In fact, if he could withstand loneliness and focus on cultivating for a few more decades, maybe he could have stood a chance. Unfortunately, he used up all three chances eventually and was thrown into the Flame Prison..."

There seemed to be a hint of regret in the Flame Being's expression.

Chapter 286: Hitting a Snag

"Five types of Pandora Demon Abilities..."

Merlin mumbled incessantly to himself in a low voice. After hearing what the Flame Being had said, Merlin fell silent.

Five types of Pandora Demon Abilities, all of which could be combined with spells – how powerful was that? At the very least, Merlin would be no match for someone like that, yet even a prodigy like that was unable to clear the third obstacle.

“Bring me there anyway. Even if I don’t complete it, I want to know how the third obstacle is really like.”

After some consideration, Merlin responded to the Flame Being. No matter what it was, he wanted to see how difficult the third obstacle was.

The Flame Being nodded. “Let’s go then. The third obstacle is right ahead. Just wait until you’ve seen it for yourself, then you’ll understand what I mean.”

With that, the Flame Being brought Merlin further forward.

After passing through a stone room and a lengthy corridor, the Flame Being brought Merlin to a hall. The hall was supported by broad crystal pillars which flickered with dazzling light. The entire hall was also covered in countless mysterious runes.

Other than this peculiar hall, what really caught Merlin’s interest was a lifelike statue in the middle of the hall.

This statue was attention-grabbing as it was enveloped in a blaze. One would be overcome by a bizarre feeling the longer they looked at it.

The Flame Being was looking at the statue with a complicated expression as well, following which it said in a low voice, “This is the third obstacle. If you can defeat the Flame Image left by Master, then you’ll complete the third obstacle and receive Master’s treasure!”

“Flame Image? Where?”

Merlin did not know what a Flame Image was at all, and surveyed his surroundings, but did not discover anything that was particularly powerful.

The Flame Being pointed at the lifelike statue, and said firmly, “This statue is Master’s Flame Image. It’ll only awaken once it’s sure that you will challenge it!”

“It’s this statue?”

Merlin was somewhat bewildered and uncertain. Even though the statue did not appear to have any exceptional features, it must, of course, be extraordinary to be the guardian of the third obstacle.

“Can you tell me about this Flame Image?”

Merlin was in no hurry to clear the obstacle and instead posed this question to the Flame Being. Throughout their exchange on the way here, Merlin had gradually realized that the Flame Being possessed an independent consciousness. Thus, perhaps he could know more about this Flame Image from the Flame Being.

The Flame Being eyed Merlin and said, “Actually, it’s not a big deal to let you know. Now that we’ve reached the third obstacle, there’s no need to keep it a secret.”

After a pause, the flames on the Flame Being began to intensify, and its voice gradually became more emphatic. “Master’s Flame Image possesses tremendous strength. Based on your standards, it’s comparable to a Seventh-level Spell Caster! However, it’s not a true Spell Caster, but only a Flame Image, so it only knows Fire-type spells. Still, these spells embody Master’s understanding of flames, so their might is especially powerful.

“At the third obstacle, no matter who you are, you’ll face a Flame Image. Even a Seventh-level Spell Caster would face a Flame Image. Previously, there was a Seventh-level Spell Caster who overcame the first two obstacles after much trial and tribulation. However, when he faced the Flame Image at the third obstacle, he attempted to complete it three times in a row but had no way of withstanding the attacks of the Flame Image. He didn’t even have the chance to be thrown into Flame Prison as he was reduced to ashes by the all-consuming flames cast by the Flame Image.

“There were two other Spell Casters who had made their way to this third obstacle. They were both stopped by the Flame Image – if they weren’t killed, they were thrown into the Flame Prison.”

Merlin could not help but steal another glance at the lifelike statue. He did not think that the Flame Image would be so terrifying, even comparable to a Seventh-level Spell Caster. Furthermore, the Fire-type spells it cast surely must have exceptional power. The combined power of which was something an average Seventh-level Spell Caster would not be able to match.

Nonetheless, Merlin could not refrain from asking, “If a First-level Spell Caster cleared the first two obstacles by a fluke, must he also face a Flame Image which is comparable to a Seventh-level Spell Caster? Or to put it another way, won’t it be a piece of cake for an Eighth-level Spell Caster, or someone even stronger, to complete the third obstacle?”

“That’s right, the Flame Image of the third obstacle is unchanging, forever maintaining its strength which is comparable to a Seventh-level Spell Caster. That’s why I advise you to concentrate on constructing spells here. When you’ve become a Spell Caster above the Fourth-level, you might have a slim chance of clearing the third obstacle by relying on the strength of the second stage Pandora Demon Ability.”

The Flame Being understood Merlin’s situation as well. Once he became a Fourth-level Spell Caster, the various Pandora Demon Abilities he had on him could be cultivated up till the second stage. In that way, Merlin’s capabilities would undergo an immense upgrade.

However, only Merlin knew that except for Darkness-type spells, he had no other Fourth-level, or higher, spells. Therefore, if he just stayed here, he had no way of becoming a Fourth-level Spell Caster.

Besides, even if he became a Fourth-level Spell Caster through sheer luck, cultivating the second stage of Pandora Demon Ability would require precious treasures. How would there be treasures like that here?

Thus, Merlin was unable to stay here for long. He needed to leave as soon as possible, only he had to face these three obstacles. Without even trying, he knew that he would surely be unable to overcome this last one.

“With such a powerful Flame Image, who else, other than Eighth or Ninth-level Spell Casters, or Great Wizards, would be able to clear the obstacle?”

Merlin even suspected that no one was able to clear this obstacle at all. Perhaps only those Eighth or Ninth-level Spell Casters, or those powerful Great Wizards, would be able to surmount this third obstacle.

“If it was a present-day Eighth or Ninth-level Spell Caster, they may not necessarily clear this obstacle. However, this place only allows entry to Seventh-level Spell Casters at most. So, Eighth or Ninth-level Spell Casters, or Great Wizards, would have no way of coming here at all.”

In the Flame Being's words, something was revealed which slightly shocked Merlin. The Flame Being seemed to hold a disdainful attitude toward contemporary Eighth and Ninth-level Spell Casters. This further supported Merlin's previous conjecture that ancient Spell Casters must be extremely powerful, far stronger than contemporary Wizards could possibly conceive.

"So, who's your Master, really? Surely you can tell me now?"

Merlin was curious. What sort of Spell Caster would leave behind a monument like this, whose mere Flame Image was so powerful?

However, the Flame Being shook its head slightly, and said in an icy tone, "Once you've cleared the third obstacle, you'll learn about Master. Alright, I've said all that I've to say. Are you going to clear the obstacle, or quietly cultivate here?"

"Clear the obstacle? Even if I was a genuine Fourth-level Spell Caster, it would be exceedingly difficult to defeat a Flame Image that's comparable to a Seventh-level Spell Caster. Or was there anyone who was only Fourth-level who had defeated a Seventh-level Spell Caster?"

Merlin spoke with a bitter smile. Even the prodigies of Ozmu, at the Fourth-level, would not be able to defeat a Seventh-level Spell Caster. Even if Merlin became a Fourth-level Spell Caster someday and cultivated all his Pandora Demon Abilities to the second stage, it was still hard to say if he would be able to defeat a Seventh-level Spell Caster.

Moreover, the Flame Image was no average Seventh-level Spell Caster, but a powerful being that was able to easily kill another Seventh-level Spell Caster.

However, the Flame Being laughed coldly in response. "Fourth-level Spell Casters can't defeat Seventh-level Spell Casters? I can only say that you're far too ignorant and uninformed. Have the Spell Casters of today's age really fallen to such a stage? Master had designed the third obstacle in order to locate a prodigy which was on par with him, or even stronger than him. In the past, when Master was a Fourth-level Spell Caster, he vanquished a personal enemy who was a Seventh-level Spell Caster. If you can't even compare to Master, then you have no right to the treasures he has left behind!"

Looking at the Flame Being's haughty expression, Merlin was shaken to the core. A Fourth-level Spell Caster, killing a Seventh-level Spell Caster, and it was during the golden age of Spell Casters – the one who left behind this monument must be a celebrated individual who lived in the era of the Molta Empire!

However, Merlin was unable to clear the third obstacle. All sorts of thoughts and ideas flashed across his mind, but none of them was a feasible plan.

“Am I really to die here, trapped?”

Merlin mumbled in a low voice. If he did not clear the obstacle, he could still live, but he would be trapped here, in torment every single day until his life ran out and he ended up as dry bones.

At the first obstacle, there had been a pile-up of dry bones which used to be Spell Casters.

“Buzz! Buzz! Buzz!”

Just then, the Bell Space at Merlin’s chest began vibrating, emanating a burst of scorching energy.

Merlin calculated the time. The Mind Power duplicate in the Bell Space must have reached its limits again, so he cleared his head of these messy thoughts, and fused the Mind Power duplicate within the Bell Space into his own Mind Power.

Once more, Merlin’s Mind Power underwent a huge increase. Finally, his Mind Power gradually stopped expanding completely. He had already reached the peak of Third-level Mind Power. Such colossal Mind Power was even enough to construct two more Second-level spells.

At the moment, Merlin had only constructed two Second-level spells, Darkness Tide and Earth Veil. He needed to construct four more Second-level spells before he could become a Second-level Spell Caster.

He needed to construct a total of six Second-level spells to advance to a Second-level Spell Caster, but this would require him to reach the stage of Fourth-level Mind Power.

In the past, when Merlin’s Mind Power had reached a level where he could construct more spells, he would be overjoyed. However, facing the third obstacle now, Merlin’s power would not increase by much even if he became a Second-level Spell Caster. It would not be of much help in terms of clearing the third obstacle.

“Flame Image, Seventh-level Spell Caster...”

Merlin suddenly had a flash of intuition. He thought of Wizard Leo and recalled that during the great battle with Ozmu, Wizard Leo had hunted down a powerful Seventh-level Spell Caster from Ozmu over a thousand miles. He even transcended his own level, and killed him with his bare hands!

“Oh right, before I left, Wizard Leo gave me the life-saving bracelet!”

With a jolt in his heart, Merlin immediately lifted his right hand. His gaze landed on his fair wrist, and as expected, he was wearing the ink-black bracelet.

Chapter 287: Life-Saving Bracelet

Wizard Leo had spent three days producing this black bracelet, and it had a life-saving function for Merlin. Within the black bracelet, there was a portion of Darkness Eye’s strength. Merlin did not understand much about Darkness Eye, but he knew that it was even more terrifying than any of the Pandora Demon Abilities he possessed.

Merlin took the bracelet off to inspect it further. He was still uncertain whether the strength of Darkness Eye in the bracelet would help him surmount the third obstacle. Nonetheless, he did not have a choice now. If he did things the conventional way and kept to his usual methods, he would be unable to clear the third obstacle in this monument

Every obstacle required an unusual strategy, perhaps a method which involved “trickery” would work. Merlin had cleared the first two obstacles through such “trickery”.

“I want to complete the third obstacle!”

Merlin stood up and yelled out. He knew that the Flame Being was monitoring the situation here.

As expected, as soon as Merlin spoke, a blurred silhouette gradually appeared in the stone room. It was the Flame Being.

“You want to complete the third obstacle?”

The Flame Being furrowed its brows, a trace of doubt in its voice.

“That’s right, I want to complete the third obstacle!”

Merlin said, determined.

Looking at Merlin’s expression, the Flame Being initially wanted to say something, but it finally shook its head. A peculiar gust of fluctuations emerged around it.

“Awake, Flame Image!”

The Flame Being chanted an ancient incantation. The statue in the middle of the hall immediately began to glow with rays of white light. Following that, the light transformed into fiery wisps of flame, and the statue instantly “came alive”.

“Who wants to complete the obstacle?”

After the statue “came alive”, its gaze landed on Merlin. It was different from the guardian of the first obstacle, for this “resurrected” statue was not stiff nor lacking expression, but was instead like a genuine, powerful Spell Caster. Its eyes were filled with a sophisticated intelligence.

Under the attentive stare of the Flame Image, Merlin felt that it saw right through his entire being. He knew that if it really attacked, the Flame Image could kill him in a single blow.

The disparity in strength between them was far too wide. The force surrounding the Flame Image was much stronger than that of Wizard Heusius and other Seventh-level Spell Casters in the Dark Magic Region. This indicated that the Flame Image was indeed no average Seventh-level Spell Caster.

“You’re the one who wants to complete the challenge?”

The Flame Image spoke once more.

Merlin nodded with a solemn expression, yet a disappointed look washed over the Flame Image's face as it said in a gruff voice, "How disappointing. In so many years, there are no Spell Casters who've been a threat to me... You have great potential, possessing many types of Pandora Demon Abilities. If you can cultivate until you're at the Fourth-level or above, perhaps there might be a slim chance that I might feel some pressure. For now, you're too weak. When Master left me behind, he wanted me to select a Spell Caster who was not inferior to him. He did not want me to kill people recklessly. You've awakened me, but I'll give you a chance. Surrender voluntarily, and then work on cultivating yourself. Once you've become a Fourth-level Spell Caster or higher, then come wake me again."

With that, the Flame Image prepared to fall into slumber once more.

"I'm here to complete the obstacle. Make your move!"

Merlin's voice sounded rather calm. He casually raised the bracelet with a dignified expression.

"Hmm? A casting tool? Fine then, since you won't give up, I'll show you the real difference between us!"

The Flame Image lightly extended one hand, and instantly, the temperature of the entire hall rose up abruptly. Without warning, raging flames appeared all around Merlin.

These flames were able to easily turn Merlin, and the two robes he was wearing, into ashes.

At this moment, Merlin's eyes were fixed on the ink-black bracelet. The Magic Power of the Darkness-type Spell Model in his body quickly and wildly surged into the bracelet.

His success or failure in clearing the third obstacle hinged on the power of the bracelet Wizard Leo had given him. Merlin did not have much faith that he would be successful alone.

"Buzz! Buzz! Buzz!"

Following the infusion of Merlin's Mind Power, the ink-black bracelet began to vibrate violently. At the same time, an apparition of a giant, blood-red eye gradually formed above the ink-black bracelet.

As he looked at this apparition of a crimson eye, Merlin instantly thought of Wizard Leo's Darkness Eye. He was feeling anxious as he had never truly seen how powerful Wizard Leo's Darkness Eye was.

"Hmm? This... What's this?"

When the apparition of the blood-red eye appeared, the gaze of the Flame Image, which had appeared relaxed, suddenly sharpened. Beside it, the Flame Being focused its stare as an appalled expression grew over its face.

"Darkness Eye, it's actually Darkness Eye? How can there be anyone who could still cultivate Darkness Eye now?"

The Flame Being mumbled softly. Perhaps in these millennia, throughout the time it had spent in the monument, it had never been as astounded as it was now.

"Darkness Eye, delude!"

A cold and detached voice suddenly came from the apparition of the crimson eye. At the same time, a beam of black light shone from the apparition, which enveloped the Flame Image.

"Haha, oh the Darkness Eye, the Darkness Eye of the legends..."

The Flame Image began to laugh maniacally. As soon as the black light enveloped it, frightening fluctuations which were beyond comparison erupted around its body. A wave of Mind Power, colossal to an extreme, immediately dispelled the Hallucinating spell of Darkness Eye.

Presently, the Flame Image was completely submerged in a blaze, looking like a god as it hovered in mid-air. It fixed its gaze onto the apparition of Darkness Eye.

"Darkness Eye belonging to the Great Legend of Darkness, Oflas. I didn't think that I would still see it..."

In this instance, Merlin truly witnessed how powerful the Flame Image was. The sheer force of the formless energy surrounding its body was able to completely suppress Merlin. He dared not move

even a muscle now. It seemed like he would be turned into ashes if the Flame Image had increased its force even by a small margin.

This was the true power of the Flame Image and its terrifying extent. Even if Merlin became a Fourth-level Spell Caster, he would still be no match for it.

Such a powerful Flame Image – Merlin was no longer able to think of anyone who could overcome this obstacle.

However, based on the Flame Image's grave expression, it seemed that Wizard Leo's Darkness Eye was not that simple. Even the Flame Image was treating it seriously.

"Darkness Eye, exterminate!"

With another cold command, suddenly, the apparition of Darkness Eye became more faint but the Darkness Element it had gathered became more frightening.

"Whoosh!"

Suddenly, a massive beam of black light descended once again, and everywhere the light touched, the flames were extinguished. The entire hall was plunged into complete darkness.

It should be known that these were the flames of a Seventh-level spell, and it embodied the monument's mysterious master's understanding of flames, so these flames must be scarier than the average Seventh-level spell.

Even so, under the light radiated by Darkness Eye, these flames were extinguished without any resistance.

"Sizzle..."

The black light submerged the Flame Image, and loose clouds of smoke began to appear. The body of the Flame Image seemed to be melting.

This was the second attack by the apparition of Darkness Eye. Merlin had never witnessed Wizard Leo's full demonstration of Darkness Eye's powers, so he did not know Darkness Eye's true strength.

However, as he watched Darkness Eye emitting the black light, Merlin could not help but feel unnerved. Merely looking at the beam of black light was enough to induce an icy sensation all over him.

The Flame Image was not able to withstand the second attack of Darkness Eye. The flames surrounding its body were almost extinguished completely, and half of its body was melting now.

Merlin thought of the rumors regarding Wizard Leo's glorious military success of how he had hunted the Seventh-level Spell Caster Osseus from Ozmu over a long distance and finally killed him.

Moreover, Wizard Leo had only paid the price of one arm!

Merlin had already encountered a few prodigies of Ozmu. Among them, the strongest one was Bluebird, but even she was only a Third-level Spell Caster. In comparison, a Seventh-level Spell Caster was on a completely different level – a world of difference from a Third-level Spell Caster.

Osseus, being a Seventh-level Spell Caster from Ozmu, must have been powerful to an extent beyond the comprehension of most Spell Casters. Merlin, along with some other Spell Casters, had thought that Osseus was only an average Spell Caster in Ozmu, which was why Wizard Leo who had a mighty Pandora Demon Ability was able to kill him.

However, it seemed now that the capability of Darkness Eye far exceeded Merlin's imagination. Most Seventh-level Spell Casters would be no match for it. Nonetheless, even with such powerful Darkness Eye, Wizard Leo still had to sacrifice an arm to kill Osseus. This was evidence of Osseus' strength too.

Perhaps Ozmu had signed a pact with the Dark Magic Region and other spell casters' organizations largely due to Wizard Leo's killing of Osseus.

These thoughts flashed across Merlin's mind one by one.

“Darkness Eye... Still, it's not enough, far from it. Essence of Fire, burn away...”

Following the Flame Image's booming command, its body, which had been half-melted, was now burning in licks of turbulent flames once again. These flames were no longer a fiery red but were somewhat akin to the third stage of Merlin's Fiery Collapse, being almost transparent!

The near-transparent flames were even more petrifying. Merlin could not help but retreat further and further. He was unable to intervene in this battle between Darkness Eye and the Flame Image, for even the slightest fallout from this fight would cause Merlin to be annihilated.

The flames released by the Flame Image were almost transparent and immediately ripped apart the black light filling up the hall. The hall resumed its initial appearance, and there was only the Flame Image, burning with translucent flames, and the giant apparition of Darkness Eye, facing off in mid-air.

"Darkness Eye, disintegrate!"

The huge apparition of Darkness Eye began to tremble violently, and the endless Darkness Element condensed into a large hand. However, after the formation of the large hand, the apparition, which was already very faint, collapsed in an instant, vanishing in the hall.

Chapter 288: Maxim!

In the Dark Magic Region, within Wizard Leo's tower, Wizard Leo initially wore a serene expression. Mysterious runes constantly emerged around him one by one and encircled him.

Wizard Leo's mastery of runes was better than most, so after he had resolved his grudges with Ozmu, he threw himself into the research of runes wholeheartedly.

However, Wizard Leo's face flushed red suddenly. In particular, the blood-red third eye on his forehead quickly opened, and drops of fresh blood began flowing from the crimson eye, dripping to the ground.

Wizard Leo was shaking fiercely all over. The blood-red third eye began to glow with bursts of red light, only this light was rapidly weakening. It was a frightening sight.

"What's the matter? To activate the third form of Darkness Eye... What has Merlin encountered?"

Wizard Leo forced himself to calm his horrified emotions. He immediately knew what had happened. Back then, he had given Merlin a life-saving bracelet, which contained some of Darkness Eye's strength.

Nevertheless, not even Merlin knew that once he used the life-saving bracelet, Wizard Leo's Darkness Eye would react instantly. Furthermore, Wizard Leo's Darkness Eye evidently seemed to be suffering from serious damage now as it was dripping blood. This did not even happen when he was hunting Osseus.

Wizard Leo's face shifted irregularly. He knew clearly how powerful the Darkness Eye he had obtained was. Wizard Leo had always claimed that he had refined Darkness Eye through trial and error, which was why he was able to cultivate it.

However, in truth, Wizard Leo understood very well that he was merely a Sixth-level Spell Caster, so how would he be able to rectify Darkness Eye completely? Besides his fortunate encounters, the more significant reason for his success in cultivating Darkness Eye was that the one he obtained was the complete version – it was the true Darkness Eye!

Wizard Leo had previously realized something about Darkness Eye. Abyss Fort's Darkness Eye only had two forms, delude and exterminate. Conversely, Darkness Eye that Wizard Leo possessed had no less than seven forms. At the moment, he was only able to cultivate up until the third form, and every time he utilized that, he had to do it forcibly. The Darkness-type Spell Model in his body would even become unstable after he used it.

This meant that Wizard Leo had not fully mastered the third form of Darkness Eye, to say nothing of the fourth, fifth, or even the seventh form.

Wizard Leo was also astounded by the seven forms of Darkness Eye. He knew that his Darkness Eye was possibly the genuine, complete Darkness Eye. Certainly, not even ordinary Great Wizards would be able to create something like this.

It was just that no matter how he searched, he was unable to find a single trace of Darkness Eye's origins. Now that his Darkness Eye had undergone such a transformation, it must be Merlin using the life-saving bracelet which Wizard Leo had given him.

In addition, Darkness Eye was forced to utilize its third form. It was clear that Merlin had run into an overwhelming danger.

“Merlin, come back alive...”

Wizard Leo mumbled softly to himself. There was nothing he could do right now. The life-saving bracelet he gave Merlin only contained up to the third form of Darkness Eye. If the third form of Darkness Eye could not help Merlin to escape the danger he was in, then it was useless even if Wizard Leo went there himself.

...

“Bang!”

The apparition of Darkness Eye withdrew in a flash, leaving only a shapeless giant hand behind. The air whistled as the hand clawed at the Flame Image.

When the large hand formed, the Flame Image turned extremely solemn. The white flames around its body flared up into the ceiling and rapidly turned into a violent storm of fire which crashed ferociously into the large hand.

“Boom!”

A gigantic crash rang out. The giant hand, which the apparition of Darkness Eye had transformed into, slowed down slightly for a moment upon encountering the white flames. Thereafter, it immediately extinguished the flames by smacking it, its blows landing directly on the Flame Image.

Instantly, the body of the Flame Image began to crumble inch by inch. Its gaze was still fixed upon Merlin, and it let out a long sigh. “The third form of Darkness Eye, it’s merely the third form... I lost. I expected nothing less from the Pandora Demon Ability created by the Great Legend of Darkness, Oflas, throughout his lifetime...”

As soon as it spoke, the figure of the Flame Image disintegrated into sparks of fire, which vanished within the hall.

“I’ve overcome the obstacle?”

Merlin was somewhat in disbelief. It had been more than three thousand years, and no one had been able to clear the third obstacle, yet he had completed it. Although it was through a form of “trickery”, he overcame it, nonetheless.

“Snap!”

With a sharp crack, the bracelet on Merlin’s hand fell apart, breaking into fragments to the ground. The life-saving bracelet which Wizard Leo had given him could only be used once. It appeared that the life-saving bracelet would no longer be of any use now.

The Flame Being slowly approached Merlin, looking at him with a complicated expression. “Although you didn’t rely on your own strength to clear the third obstacle, Master didn’t say that one could not use casting tools when he was designing the third obstacle. So, you’ve passed the third obstacle! I really didn’t think that, even now, Darkness Eye would still be cultivated by someone, and until the third form at that...”

The words of the Flame Being and the Flame Image seemed to indicate their familiarity with Darkness Eye, yet Merlin did not know much about it. He only knew that Darkness Eye was something complex, more powerful than any Pandora Demon Ability he had on him. Otherwise, Wizard Leo would not be able to utilize Darkness Eye to kill a Seventh-level Spell Caster in Ozmu.

Therefore, Merlin asked the Flame Being, “Are all of you familiar with Darkness Eye? What are its origins, really? Which Wizard created it?”

The Flame Being glanced at Merlin. It might be due to Merlin’s success in clearing the third obstacle that its tone was mellower now as it calmly said, “We’re more than just familiar with it. Master had personally seen the Great Legend of Darkness, Wizard Oflas. More than three thousand years ago, when Master was a nameless nobody, the Legend of Darkness Wizard Oflas was one of the strongest Spell Casters alive, and received the title of Great Legend!

“Darkness Eye was created by Wizard Oflas and has seven forms altogether. With Darkness Eye, the Great Legend of Darkness Wizard Oflas, had slain many genuine gods!”

From the Flame Being’s tone of voice, it seemed to revere the Great Legend of Darkness, Wizard Oflas.

“Gods? Like the God of Light?”

It was the first time Merlin had heard of “gods”. Ever since he became a Spell Caster, he did not believe in any gods. As for the God of Light publicized by the Church of Light, from Merlin’s perspective, he guessed that it might be no more than just a relatively powerful Spell Caster and that there was no such “god”.

However, now that the Flame Being had mentioned “gods”, Merlin’s interest was instantly piqued.

“God of Light?”

The Flame Being shook its head helplessly. “These are tales from three thousand and six hundred years ago. It’s too complicated to explain everything. All that I know is left in Master’s message. Once you obtain Master’s treasure, you’ll learn of everything.”

Merlin was burning with eagerness. He was now sure that the “Master” the Flame Being spoke of was no average Great Wizard, and was even a powerful Spell Caster from the era of the Molta Empire.

He was full of anticipation about the treasure left behind by such a powerful Spell Caster. Moreover, he might learn of some secret information regarding the Molta Empire’s era three thousand and six hundred years ago. Merlin became even more impatient.

“Come on, since you’ve cleared the three obstacles, I’ll bring you to Master’s treasure.”

As soon as the Flame Being spoke, it led Merlin away from the hall into a narrow passage. After the passage, they arrived at a room which appeared to be very plain.

The room was connected to the hall. Based on its furnishings, it must be where the Flame Being’s master used to rest. Around the room were relatively smaller spaces, in which strange and bizarre items were placed, all covered in dust. Evidently, it had been a long time since anyone came in here.

The Flame Being looked at the plain room and a nostalgic expression appeared on its face. It said softly, “It’s been more than three thousand years, and Master had left us for more than three thousand years too... In the end, someone was able to clear the three obstacles. My mission is complete!”

Merlin felt that the Flame Being's tone of voice sounded rather strange, but did not say anything. He merely followed behind the Flame Being quietly.

The Flame Being brought Merlin to a stone wall, following which it reached out a hand and quickly drew a few runes. The runes immediately sank into the stone wall.

“Rumble! Rumble!”

The stone wall began to rise gradually. Although only a small crack was formed, Merlin could feel a wave of scorching energy coming from that crack.

After the stone wall opened completely, Merlin finally saw what really lay behind it. It was a room covered in narrow lines of runes. The mysterious characters were densely packed together, unceasingly flickering with light.

In the middle of the room was nothing else but a wooden rack with four legs. On the wooden rack was a delicate, transparent bell jar. Inside the bell jar was a weak ball of flame, about the size of a baby's fist.

Even though this tiny ball of flame did not appear to have much power, Merlin was able to feel an unbearable burning heat from where he stood.

Furthermore, it was not just Merlin's body which felt the heat. Even the Spell Models of Fireball and Furious Flame in Merlin's Awareness seemed to have become erratic.

This was something that had never happened to Merlin. Even the flame sprite he met back then in the ancient monument did not have the ability to destabilize his Spell Models.

“What in the world is this?”

Merlin questioned the Flame Being.

The Flame Being looked at the tiny ball of flame within the bell jar with an indiscernible expression, saying in a low voice, “This is the treasure left behind by Master – his Flame Maxim!”

As soon as it spoke, the body of the Flame Being began fading away, following which it turned into wisps of fire which burrowed into the bell jar. Slowly, it merged with the ball of flame within the bell jar.

There was only a deep sigh left behind. “It’s been over three thousand years, my mission is finally completed! I was a trace of consciousness belonging to this Flame Maxim left behind by Master. I received Master’s orders to search for a Spell Caster who could clear the three obstacles and inherit Master’s Flame Maxim. Now I’ve finally found you. Go ahead, accept Master’s Flame Maxim...”

Chapter 289: The Legend Nikola!

The Flame Being had vanished, leaving behind only Merlin in the mysterious room. The interior of the room was packed densely with runes, and they seemed to cover the entire room.

However, upon closer inspection, one would discover that these runes were centered around the transparent bell jar. The ball of flame in the size of a baby’s fist was a focal point, spread out in all directions.

Moreover, from these runes, Merlin sensed an overwhelming suppressing force. This indicated that the runes were used to suppress this ball of flame.

Merlin mumbled to himself for a moment as his eyes darted around. So, this was the Flame Maxim. Back then, he had obtained some clues from the Neverending Book, which said that if one gathered the three volumes of the Neverending Book, one would obtain a Maxim.

From that point onward, Merlin knew that a Maxim was something precious that would even drive Great Wizards wild. Now, a Flame Maxim was right before him.

Merlin did not know what risks he might be taking by accepting this Flame Maxim, but no matter how dangerous it was, he had to try. Otherwise, would it not be a waste of his painstaking efforts in completing the three obstacles?

With this decision, Merlin began to slowly approach the transparent bell jar. With every step he took toward the bell jar, he felt a scorching force which was increasingly stronger.

It was merely a small ball of flame yet its burning force seemed to be mightier than Merlin’s Fiery Collapse. Merlin’s expression gradually turned somber.

“Whew...”

Finally, Merlin was standing before the bell jar, and fixed his eyes on the near-transparent flame in it. It was such a tiny ball of flame yet it emanated incomparable scorching energy. This was under the suppression of the bell jar and densely-packed runes.

Standing before the bell jar, Merlin was hesitant to lift the bell jar even after inspecting it for the longest time. There was a sudden realization that dawned on him, the Flame Being did not tell him how to obtain this Flame Maxim.

Now that the Flame Being had disappeared, Merlin had no idea how did he have to go about things to retrieve the Flame Maxim.

After Merlin pondered for a moment, he gritted his teeth, reached out with a hand and gripped the bell jar.

“Rumble!”

Before Merlin could lift the bell jar, he felt a violent tremor. At the same moment, the dense lines of runes covering the room began flickering wildly, after which they sped toward Merlin.

These mysterious runes, over tens of thousands of them, each flew into Merlin’s body. Merlin immediately felt a burning force as if he was entirely submerged in a sea of flames. There was an unpleasant sensation which could not be described.

“You’ve finally come...”

Suddenly, a deep, weathered voice was heard, booming in Merlin’s mind.

The very scene before Merlin’s eyes changed as well as if he was in an unfamiliar and spacious void. In this space, raging flames were burning all around.

“You’ve finally come... The lucky one who qualifies to inherit my Maxim... You shall learn everything about me!”

The voice from nowhere spoke once again. Soon, the sweeping flames gradually converged into a giant-like figure, standing tall in the space. The figure was covered entirely in flames, and Merlin was unable to distinguish its appearance.

“What a beautiful time it was. Spell Casters had reached their peak, and Great Wizards were emerging everywhere. There were even Legends, and the greatest of them all, Arcane Wizards, were born.

“It was the most glorious age of Spell Casters. Under the leadership of Great Legendary Wizards, we banished countless gods. Other than the strongest of them all – the God of Light – who bitterly resisted, there were no gods left in this world.

“Potions, alchemy, runology, Pandora Demon Ability – even this demon-like power was developed to its fullest. The world was no longer able to satisfy powerful Spell Casters, so under the guidance of Great Legendary Wizards, we opened a series of portals to different dimensions, visiting them one after another. There were familiar dimensions which had just been formed, and some dimensions which were controlled by foreign gods. However, not one dimension was able to resist us. In this golden age of Spell Casters, traces of Spell Casters were left behind in innumerable unfamiliar dimensions. We were practically the only masters in many of these dimensions.

“Legendary Wizards were born, one after the other. Even I, with the help of a Great Legendary Wizard, finally consolidated my own Flame Maxim. I became a true Legendary Wizard, one who was a match for powerful gods!

“I, the Great Legend, Nikola, under the leadership of the Great Legend of Flames, invaded one dimension after another. We thought that we were the masters of millions of dimensions. We were the true supreme beings, unsurpassed by any. We banished gods and conquered dimensions. What a glorious era of Spell Casters!

“However, disaster struck. We accessed an inconceivably colossal dimension. We thought that it was filled with an endless flow of resources and riches, but we didn’t expect that there were actual demons – demons which were immeasurably more terrifying than gods!

“In that frightening dimension, a warship, larger than the sky, was piloted, possessing the terrifying power to vanquish even space itself. Countless Wizards perished and even those with the title of Great Legend fell; even the supreme Legend of Flames perished!

“I was a coward. I got scared. As innumerable Spell Casters battled with the demons of that and other dimensions, I shrunk back and returned to the Glorious Land, the great Molta Empire. From then on, the name Nikola the Legend would forever be ridiculed by Wizards!

“Who knew how much time had passed... I thought that I could live on in peace. Even if Spell Casters were fighting tens of thousands of demons in this dimension and other dimensions, we would still enjoy peace in the Glorious Land, the great Molta Empire... Until finally one day, a voice thundered through our entire land, and through the tens of thousands of dimensions. It was the voice of the supreme Arcane Wizards who were most honored by all Spell Casters!

“In a serious tone, the Arcane Wizards called upon all Spell Casters to lend their strength, to leave the Glorious Land and carry out a final battle against the demons of all dimensions in order to protect the last piece of untarnished ground – the Glorious Land!

“This time, I am no coward! I, the Great Legend, Nikola, am about to fight for the Glorious Land. I am about to leave this place, leave the Glorious Land. I may never return this time, and I don’t know what will really happen. Perhaps the glory of Spell Casters will continue, or perhaps Spell Casters will never shine as brightly. Therefore, I’ve left a Maxim behind, as the only evidence of the Great Legend Nikola in the Glorious Land, my home!”

As soon as the last word was spoken, the gigantic figure of flame collapsed with a rumble and turned into a field of flames once more.

Merlin was incomparably astounded. This was information from over three thousand and six hundred years ago. The master of this monument was a powerful Legendary Wizard – the Legend Nikola!

From the message the Legend Nikola left behind, Merlin knew, for the first time, that above Great Wizards was the rank of Legendary Wizards, and above Legendary Wizards were the supreme Arcane Wizards.

Merlin also learned that there were gods in this world, only they had been banished. During the most glorious age of Spell Casters, gods were nothing to be afraid of, and Spell Casters had even been the true rulers of dimensions, tens of thousands of them, at one point.

Every single Legendary Wizard was as powerful as a god. During the era of the Molta Empire, the golden age of Spell Casters, gods were banished, and dimensions were conquered. Merlin could not even imagine how would such a massive, magnificent scene look like.

That was the most glorious age of Spell Casters, three thousand and six hundred years ago. The Molta Empire had united the world, and Spell Casters stepped into their golden age as they began to conquer dimensions one after another. The Molta Empire also had become the homeland of countless Spell Casters, the Glorious Land of Spell Casters.

The Legend Nikola had become a Great Legendary Wizard under these circumstances!

Merlin had already imprinted these details deep into his mind. He merely digested a small part of the information, and there was still much-revealed information which he would have to slowly analyze at a later date.

“Boom!”

The indescribable void which Merlin was in suddenly vanished and he awakened once more. He discovered that he was still in the cramped room. Only the runes of the room had disappeared as they had burrowed into his body.

At the same time, even the ball of flame within the bell jar had disappeared. Only the empty transparent bell jar was left behind.

With a jolt of his heart, Merlin realized that while he was receiving the message left behind by the Legend Nikola earlier, that Flame Maxim must have undergone some change. It was just that Merlin did not know what change this was.

Just as he was feeling bewildered and uncertain, an unbearable burning sensation emanated from his body – in particular, his Awareness.

Merlin quickly checked the situation in his Awareness. Only after looking did he see that the Flame Maxim had entered his Awareness without him realizing it.

In addition, it had stopped above the Spell Models of Furious Flame and Fireball, emitting traces of scorching energy. It was in fact silently suppressing these two Spell Models.

Merlin gradually recovered from his emotions, following which he carefully detached a strand of Mind Power to touch the Flame Maxim. Nothing happened. Merlin tried again, this time using the

Magic Power within the Spell Model of Furious Flame to activate the Flame Maxim, but it was still to no avail.

This ball of Flame Maxim hovered silently above the Spell Models, faintly suppressing them. Other than that, it did not really affect anything.

Merlin drew in a deep breath. From the words of the Legend Nikola, Merlin learned that it was extremely difficult to consolidate a Maxim. If one could create a genuine Maxim, that was the sign one had become a Legendary Wizard!

Maxims were essential to Legendary Wizards as well. Giving up even a small part of a Maxim would greatly affect the Legendary Wizard. Back then, the Legend Nikola had left behind this Maxim as he was pessimistic about the future. That was why he had left something behind in the Glorious Land.

With Merlin's present capabilities, it might be hard for him to refine this Maxim. However, if he could understand the functions of this Maxim and increase his powers in that manner, it would also be an incredible benefit.

As he thought of this, Merlin mobilized all his Mind Power and rapidly channeled it into the Flame Maxim!

Chapter 290: The Islands in a Crisis!

At present, there were a few foreign Spell Casters gathered in Fort Udon. Based on the robes they wore, they were not Wizards of Fort Udon. If one was familiar with the Spell Casters of the Kurdmansla Islands, one would be surprised to discover that they were in fact Wizards from Wizard's Tower and Gray Wing Alliance.

On the entire Kurdmansla Islands, the three colossal factions practically controlled everything on the islands. Furthermore, the three factions each possessed about the same level of strength and were always in competition at any given time.

Wizard's Tower was slightly better off as everyone who joined them were Fourth-level Spell Casters or higher. Therefore, the resources they needed were very precious and were usually located in the vast ocean. As a result, the competition between them and Gray Wing Alliance or Fort Udon was not that fierce.

However, it was different with Gray Wing Alliance and Fort Udon. There were many overlapping areas between these two factions, and small conflicts often erupted between them, leading to a tense relationship.

Today, the fact that people from Gray Wing Alliance and Wizard's Tower had shown up in Fort Udon could be considered a rare occurrence.

“Wizard Umo, your Fort Udon must've gotten the news too. Speak, for this is a matter of life and death for the entire Kurdmansla Islands!”

A Spell Caster with short red hair spoke coldly.

Wizard Umo, as one of the three fort leaders in Fort Udon, was naturally well-respected, but he was not angered even when he heard the blunt words of the Wizard with fiery red hair. Instead, he began contemplating.

After a long time, Wizard Umo raised his head and narrowed his eyes, which glinted with a steady light. He said in a low voice, “The movements of the sea beasts this time are unusual. Since you have all come, I'm sure you understand the situation clearly. However, there's something which you might not have known – the sea beasts have sent two black sharks which are king beasts!”

“What? Black sharks which are king beasts? Two of them – how is that possible?”

The faces of the Spell Casters from Gray Wing Alliance and Wizard's Tower changed greatly. They knew very well what the king beasts, these black sharks, signified. In the vast ocean, the true rulers were not Spell Casters like them, but these interminable sea beasts!

Moreover, among these sea beasts, the most terrifying ones were the king beasts. Perhaps, there were even stronger sea beasts, only they were not yet discovered. The king beasts themselves were comparable to the Great Wizards of Spell Casters.

Fortunately, these sea beasts usually acted separately. Each king beast had a predetermined region as its territory, in which no other king beasts were allowed. If one approached, it would even draw the frantic attack of the other king beast.

King beasts belonging to the same group might be slightly friendlier to each other, but even then, they were not allowed to encroach into each other's territory.

The current situation where two black sharks which were king beasts joining forces was really an uncommon event.

“What's impossible about that? The two king beasts, which are black sharks, have formed a group, and they have divided a large area as their territory. Unfortunately, our Kurdmansla Islands is right within the territory which the two king beasts have marked. We will suffer from non-stop attacks from the two king beasts unless we move away. Previously, when the surrounding islands of the Kurdmansla Islands were successively attacked by the sea beasts, it was, in fact, the tentative warning attacks of these two black sharks.”

Wizard Umo laughed coldly. He would not be too obliging toward people from Gray Wing Alliance and Wizard's Tower.

The expressions of the Spell Casters from Gray Wing Alliance and Wizard's Tower were rather sour. There was only one way that the two kings like the black sharks would join forces, and that was if the two king beasts formed a group.

If that was really the case, then the Kurdmansla Islands was truly in danger. Two king-beast level black sharks were equivalent to two Great Wizards. The king beasts were the absolute overlords of the vast endless sea.

“Wizard Umo, what do you think the Kurdmansla Islands should do?”

The Spell Caster with short red hair fixed his gaze on Wizard Umo as he spoke. Thereafter, all the present Spell Casters looked toward Wizard Umo.

Still, Wizard Umo remained unperturbed, and said coldly, “What else is there to do? Your Gray Wing Alliance is well aware that at this point, we can only ask for the help of the Great Wizard Kansu. If he can take this on, we might still have a slight hope of holding onto the Kurdmansla Islands. Otherwise, others may leave, but the foundations of all three major factions are on the Kurdmansla Islands. Once we leave, the Kurdmansla Islands will no longer exist. Without our foundations, we'll become roaming Wizards!”

The faces of the Wizards from Gray Wing Alliance and Wizard's Tower darkened slightly. Others could leave, but they, the Spell Casters from the three major factions, could not, because once they

left, the foundations of the three major factions would cease to exist. They had spent no small effort to establish these factions. If they continued developing for over a century, they might acquire a heritage which was akin to a spell casters' organization's.

Conversely, once they left, they would become roaming Wizards. Most Spell Casters in the three major factions used to be roaming Wizards, and they had first-hand knowledge of how difficult it was being a roaming Wizard. Naturally, they must not give up their foundations on the Kurdmansla Islands so easily.

“When Wizard Kansu first came to the Kurdmansla Islands, he made it clear that he was only here temporarily, and he didn't join any factions, let alone set up one. He can leave anytime he wants.”

A Wizard from Gray Wing Alliance frowned while speaking.

The Kurdmansla Islands were indeed overseen by a Great Wizard, who was called the Great Wizard Kansu! Nevertheless, only the higher-ups of these major factions, who held core positions, knew of this. The Great Wizard Kansu, in reality, was merely on the Kurdmansla Islands on a temporary basis and had no obligation to help the Kurdmansla Islands defend against these sea beasts.

Wizard Umo stood up and his eyes sharpened instantly. He said heavily, “It's true that the Great Wizard Kansu had made that clear at the start, but we only need to lend more weight to our persuasion. We, three factions have been operating on this island for so many years, I believe we all have precious treasures stowed away. Hehe, this time, it won't be stowed away any longer. No matter how precious your treasure is, can it compare to the very foundations we have on the Kurdmansla Islands? As long as the Great Wizard Kansu gets items which he's satisfied with, he'll assist us quite naturally.”

“Very well, we shall request authorization for this!”

Wizard Umo nodded, following which the Wizards hurriedly turned and left.

“This is the biggest calamity faced by my Fort Udon, even the entire Kurdmansla Islands...”

A faint, worrisome light shone in Wizard Umo's eyes.

...

“Boom!”

Merlin summoned all his Mind Power to fiercely simulate the Flame Maxim in his Awareness. At that moment, the Flame Maxim finally began changing.

As his Mind Power swept over the Flame Maxim like a wave, Merlin felt as if he was submerged in the middle of a borderless sea of flame. Flames encompassed his entire Awareness, and an unbearable burning sensation spread throughout his body.

Not even Mind Power was able to block this scorching sensation. It even burnt up, shocking Merlin. Mind Power was something incorporeal and was essentially illusory. However, this ball of flame currently seemed likely to burn even his Mind Power.

This was far beyond Merlin’s expectations!

A Maxim was something which Merlin had no way of comprehending. Not even Great Wizards were able to grasp what it was, let alone someone like Merlin. He had never intended to refine this Maxim now but instead wanted to discover how this Maxim could possibly be of use to him.

After he endured the searing temperature of the Flame Maxim, Merlin was pleasantly surprised to find that the state of the entire monument seemed to be imprinted in his mind. He had a feeling of being in control of this monument.

The outlines of this monument also appeared in his mind. It looked to be a large ship, and the air bubbles outside were in fact layers of protective energy which was beyond Merlin’s understanding, enclosing the entire ship. It was able to freely travel along the bottom of the ocean, even if tens of thousands of years had passed. As long as the monument still had energy, it was able to sustain itself.

This energy required more than just elemental crystal stones. By themselves, these stones would find it hard to sustain such a huge consumption of energy. Besides elemental crystal stones, the ship itself was also absorbing the energy of Fire Element.

Of course, there was no Fire Element at the bottom of the ocean, but there seemed to be faint cracks in space-time all around the ship. The ship absorbed Fire Element through such cracks and used the energy to support itself.

Now, Merlin could confirm that this monument was an extremely mighty alchemy product. It was able to absorb Fire Element from space-time. Not even the Legend Nikola would be able to do this. It must be an unknown, especially powerful Wizard who transfigured this expressly for the Legend Nikola.

Moreover, the thing which controlled this powerful alchemy product was a Flame Maxim left behind by the Legend Nikola. Now that the Flame Maxim had entered Merlin's Awareness, he was able to utilize this Maxim to control this powerful alchemy product even though he did not have the ability to refine the Maxim.

Very soon, Merlin withdrew his Mind Power from the Flame Maxim. He already had a slight understanding of how this Flame Maxim was like. Its biggest benefit was the ability to control this alchemy product which could freely traverse the ocean floors.

This alchemy product was something even the Legend Nikola had treasured, so it must have some wondrous trait. However, Merlin had just begun to understand all these, so he had no way of grasping everything completely. After some time, he might be able to comprehensively control this alchemy product.

Besides the advantage of controlling the alchemy product, the Flame Maxim had another feature which Merlin had taken notice of. Namely, it was able to suppress flames, and it seemed that any flames would be affected by the Maxim's suppression.

"Fiery Collapse!"

Merlin tried casting Fiery Collapse, but as soon as the white flames were produced, Merlin used his Mind Power to fiercely simulate the Flame Maxim. In that instant, Fiery Collapse seemed to fall under a shapeless pressure and was not at all like the mighty flames which used to surge and roar.

"As I thought, Fiery Collapse also succumbs to this suppression... Perhaps I could try forcing Fiery Collapse to merge with my Fire-type spells!"

As he stared at the powerful Pandora Demon Ability suppressed by the Flame Maxim, a bold and daring idea occurred to Merlin.