

Warlord 211

## Chapter 211 Pagoda of Time (2)

In Dilan's opinion, it made no sense for someone to be generous enough to simply give away something without demanding something else of an equal price in return.

This was how 'fair trade' had always been, and every transaction was conducted to balance the exchange. Every action had a reaction and everything had its price, whether it was something materialistic, emotions, or anything else!

When he entered the Pagoda of Time, he had not noticed the price at first.

In fact, most people wouldn't even notice that something was off. They would probably be happy to encounter something nice and think of it as a miraculous opportunity.

But after facing the Sun temple, Dilan had grown more wary trusting anyone.

That didn't mean he wouldn't act rashly or that he would let go of some opportunities but that he wouldn't trust in things foreign to Milarn.

In his opinion, everyone and everything from outside Milarn was trying to get their hands on something from beings that called the planet their home. It included information, land, or the people themselves living on Milarn.

Right now, the price seemed to be information, specifically Dilan's combat information, including his physical condition, his limits and so on.

It was quite interesting, that was for sure. However, more important was the fact that Dilan had gained a lot in exchange for the information, which made it seem as if it was not important.

"If someone is willing to sacrifice thousands of Tierless and Tier-1 monsters and various treasures in exchange for some information, that either means this person is filthy rich and interested in turning the human race into his disciples, or that he/she wants to get to know more information about their enemies..."

There were other potential reasons for the existence of the Pagoda of Time, but it was not actually something Dilan should be bothered about.

If they wanted resources, that was perfectly fine with him. Dilan was currently in a weakened state and he had yet to go all-out.

Simultaneously, he had yet to get his hands on the extraordinary drops that had been promised by the notification he had received before entering the Pagoda of Time.

These extraordinary drops should be Ability crystals or something like that, which was why Dilan was willing to enter the dungeon, to begin with.

'As long as I can get my hands on a new source to procure ability crystals, everything will turn out to be fine.'

Ascenders could grow exponentially fast as long as they possessed just one powerful ability.

Unfortunately, powerful ability crystals were hard to find, and the demand for them was even higher. Everyone wanted one, which was only obvious.

Thus, by entering the Pagoda of Time, he hoped to get his hands on a few ability crystals.

'Maybe I can exchange them with the Dungeon Points I will get after conquering the dungeon...wait...'

Dilan just thought of something once again, which caused him to frown deeply.

"Can I just leave the Pagoda of Time and receive my Dungeon points, or do I have to wait for who knows how many floors until I conquer the entire Pagoda?"

Dilan predicted that he would encounter Gold Tier-1 Monsters on the 15th Floor.

He was confident of defeating a few Gold Tier-1 monsters while being able to go all-out in his peak state.

However, right now, could he risk fighting and defeating more than one Gold Tier-1 monster while dozens of Silver Tier-1 monsters would support the Gold Tier-1 monsters? Forget it!

As they were bipedal monsters that could wield powerful weapons, they were far stronger than ordinary monsters as well.

Right now, Dilan was already excited at the prospect of fighting more Silver Tier-1 monsters, simply because it was challenging to defeat 50 Silver Tier-1 monsters that were around 4-5 levels below him.

Others wouldn't be able to achieve this, with the exception of Yvonne. She was probably strong enough to make this happen.

Even he was not confident in his current strength.

However, this was even more reason for him to give his all, and to test out the generosity of the being, who created the Pagoda of Time for the sake of procuring information!

'I don't know what else the Pagoda of Time could take from me, except information'

Dilan didn't feel anything odd about himself. Everything felt exactly the same as always. Thus, there was no need for him to worry too much about the price he would most pay for entering the Pagoda of Time.

Instead of worrying, Dilan entered the 11th Floor, where he encountered more than three dozen Silver Tier-1 monsters.

Their stats were still lower than Dilan's but the difference was not high enough for the young man to ignore the numerical disadvantage.

He could only give his best as always.

Upon activating [Thunder Step], he dashed toward the closest opponent, and cut his arm off in an instant.

A red flash was everything his opponents could see before the severed arm fell to the ground with a thud.

Dilan didn't hesitate as he moved as fast as lightning. His movements were smooth and agile as his hand holding the Blazing Serpentine Blade shot out.

Moving around as if he was dancing, Dilan turned his surroundings into a raging storm of blood, intestines, bone fragments, and brain mass.

His motions didn't show any signs of Dilan's weakened state. He moved as if he was flowing in the water, flying with the wind currents around him, and as if he was born to do what he was currently doing.

He was a blazing blur of destruction that was obliterating the masses of monsters. Some slashed at him with their weapons, some used their abilities to slow him down and overwhelm him through a wider variety of attacks, while some tried to protect themselves.

None of his opponents was weak, yet, all of them had one thing in common.

All of them were dead because of Dilan's blade.

Despite the huge numerical disadvantage, Dilan was far from being defeated. His Stamina decreased quickly but his high Health stat allowed him to recuperate whenever he was not overly straining himself.

If someone were to see him fighting right now, they would never ever believe that Dilan was not in a weakened state right now...they would think that he was far from unleashing his true strength, or that he was fighting monsters, whose average stats were not lower than him than 10 right now.

The bipedal monsters in the Pagoda of Time were far stronger than the monsters outside. It was easy to die in the Pagoda of Time.

However, at the same time, it was equally easy to become much stronger in the Pagoda of Time, exceed one's limits and reach new heights.

Dilan clearly noticed this as well.

Not relying on his overwhelmingly high stats allowed him to gain more combat experience, to learn more about his passive ability [True weapon specialist], and much more.

Many new things were unveiled to him in the time that passed after he had advanced to the 11th floor and continued to move upwards.

He had conquered the 14th Floor by now and was on a winning streak as he continued to defeat the same kind of monsters over and over again.

There was a high variety of monsters in the towers, however, the Ordinary, Bronze, and Silver monsters continued to appear no matter how many times he killed them, meaning that he fought against the same Ordinary Tier-1 monsters several times, while the same applied to the Bronze and Silver Tier-1 monsters.

This hadn't been bothersome, but it prevented Dilan from fulfilling his plan on filling up the gap of his missing stats. He had wanted to increase his stats with the Essence crystals he was about to collect from the monsters he had killed from the first floor onward!

'Will it be enough to conquer the 15th floor, or should I try to leave before it's too late?' Dilan wondered.

But it was not even a second later that he shook his head, disregarding the thought of leaving.

He looked at a seemingly ordinary, yet, somewhat special stone in his hand as he smiled faintly.

"If I missed these stones on the lower floors, I should definitely go back and pick them up as well. They will be my, and our group's best way to conquer this place over and over again, without the need to fear being defeated!!"

Chapter 212 Final Floor

[Whetstone] <Bronze Tier-1> treasure

One-time use!

When used on a weapon, its sharpness and endurance will be amplified. Amplification is between 5%~15% depending on the weapon's quality and potential.

Duration: 10 hours

Remark: Only one Whetstone can be used on a weapon in 24 hours.

?(O)??? The stone Dilan was holding was a Whetstone, but not an ordinary one.

It had dropped from a monster that had turned into countless particles a few minutes after he had killed it.

Several monsters had turned into Whetstones, ability crystals, pieces of equipment, and other objects several minutes after their deaths.

But this was only something Dilan realized after reaching the 14th floor.--?(O)???

After he spent almost an hour returning to the 1st floor to collect the Essence crystals of all monster corpses, Dilan knew for sure that he had missed out on numerous monster drops.

Nearly 15% of the monsters he had killed had turned into monster drops similar to the ones he found on the 14th floor.

"Did I not notice the drops because I rushed through the Pagoda's floors as quickly as possible?"

Dilan believed that this was the reason for him missing it. He didn't waste his time and focused on collecting the corpses, the Essence crystals, and the drops that had been left behind by the monsters, who had turned into countless particles.

Most of the drops were Whetstones of varying Tier and quality. There were more than 150 of them, which was quite satisfying to see.

Each of these Whetstones could increase one Ascender's combat prowess drastically. It was a great treasure, even if it could only be used once before it would disintegrate.

Even a single use on the Blazing Serpentine Blade would turn the weapon into a far stronger and lethal weapon than any other that Dilan had ever wielded.

With the enhanced weapon, a Gold Tier-1 monster stood no chance against him, even if its hide would be as thick as the Inferior Two-Headed Hydrani's hide! ?(O)???

Upon realizing this, Dilan smiled brightly as he received the notifications of the Essence crystals he had absorbed.

[705 Ordinary, 560 <Bronze>, and 380 <Silver> Essences have been absorbed→ +1.2 Strength, +2 Health, +0.7 Stamina, +1.7 Agility]

[Essence pool has been filled. Host reached Level 9(Tier-1)! +1.0 Status points can be allocated!]

Thanks to the Essences Dilan had absorbed, his weakened state had disappeared completely. This was much faster than he could have hoped for and it was mostly owed to his unique constitution.

In a matter of two days, he had absorbed close to 3000 Essence crystals, used his Origin ability more than 100 times, and his passive healing capabilities had received an exceptional boost as well.

It was just that Dilan didn't expect to have killed so many monsters but the notification never lied to him so it was a shocking truth.

The only disappointing fact was his stats but that was something he had long since accepted.

His level had been higher than the monsters, whose Essences he had absorbed, thus the status points he received had been reduced further than the meager one-tenth he could barely get thanks to the [Will of the Primordial].

Stretching his body once again, he began to smile.

"A few Gold Essence Crystals wouldn't be bad. Getting my hands on a Gold Tier-1 treasure would be nice."

Dilan felt excitement coursing through his body as he anticipated laying his hands on powerful treasures which he could obtain as long as he kept conquering the Pagoda of Time.

He nearly forgot that the existence of the Pagoda of Time was likely to have been created because of some ill intention of a powerful existence, whether it was to procure information, surveillance of a weak race that was trying to survive its first months since the Primordial Ascension or whatever reason there was for the Pagoda of Time to exist, in the first place.

The drops in the Pagoda of Time were worth any price which was why Dilan chose not to bother about it for the time being.

He reached the 15th floor, determined to whoop the butts of some Gold Tier-1 monsters and their Silver Tier-1 followers!

His eyes gleamed brightly as he entered the large open floor, but he instantaneously noticed that there were no stairways to go upward.

"So I'm on the last floor? What a shame." Dilan mumbled but his smile was still vibrant nonetheless.

If he wanted to, he could re-enter the Pagoda of Time later again. At least he was pretty sure that it should be possible to re-enter the Pagoda of Time sometime in the future. After all, it was labeled Instance Dungeon, a term that was usually used in games.

But instead of dreaming about re-entering the dungeon, Dilan knew that he had to clear it first. Clearing it was his highest priority and the four-meter-tall minotaur that was surrounded by more than 20 smaller Minotaurs was more than enough to show Dilan that this was going to be a fierce battle.

“Finally I can fight Minotaurs once again. I have been missing you guys ever since I cleared the first floor!” Even the ordinary Tier-1 Minotaurs had been quite annoying to kill.

Their physical strength was extraordinary and both their wild instincts and high combat awareness were perfectly compatible with one another.

They increased the Minotaurs’ whole strength to a new level, allowing them to fight monsters that were of a higher level than themselves.

Upon seeing the Gold Tier-1 Minotaur, whose hide was reddish, and the grayish-silver Silver Tier-1 Minotaurs next to him, Dilan smiled brightly as he brandished the Blazing Serpentine Blade to his right side.

A blazing fire engulfed the Serpentine Blade but at the same time, a flame engulfed [Mana Slash] shot toward the Minotaurs.

The Red Minotaur brandished its black sword at the Mana slash while releasing an ear-splitting roar.

Dilan’s ear drums nearly ruptured upon hearing the roar but he was not able to pay much attention to the pain and bleeding in his ear that resulted due to the deafening roar.

Instead, his entire attention was focused on the Minotaur whose eyes were suddenly shrouded in a bloodthirsty red hue.

‘Did they enter a Berserk-like state?!’ Dilan asked, concluding that the roar had caused this. His prediction was correct, and even worse, the ability used by the Gold Tier-1 Minotaur had increased the strength of his brethren and that of his own by more than 30%!

Following that, the Minotaurs used another ability, increasing their physical strength by more than 30 Units. Through this, the Gold Tier-1 Minotaur’s physical strength exceeded Dilan’s by far.

The Strength stat of the Silver Tier-1 Minotaurs crossed 60 Units, while the Gold Tier-1 Minotaur’s strength was close to 100 Units.

Dilan’s Strength was also at 60 Units when he didn’t enhance it. Meaning that the Silver Tier-1 Minotaurs were not necessarily stronger.

However, from the moment he perceived how they moved, Dilan knew that the fight would be bothersome.

The situation grew even worse when he noticed that the Silver Tier-1 Minotaurs had an Agility that exceeded 30 Units, while the Gold Tie-1 Minotaur’s Agility exceeded 70 Units!

It was merely a Tier-1 monster at Level 8, however, its average stats were close to the peak of Tier-1!!

'If that's the strength of a Gold Tier-1 monster, who has yet to reach Level 25, or base stats reaching the peak of Tier-1...how powerful will a stronger monster be??'

Chapter 213 Power

When Dilan saw how easily the Minotaur Leader destroyed his Mana Slash, Dilan's smile turned broader.

He completely forgot about his mission, the people he was responsible for and the possible dangers the Pagoda of Time might harbor.

His mind was solely focused on the situation ahead and the powerful Minotaur, whose red hide smoked.

Wanting to calm his erratic heart, he clutched his chest with his free hand and could feel his wild heartbeat..

Goosebumps sprang up all over his body the moment he sensed that the Minotaurs in front of him were even stronger than the believers of the Sun temple, whom he had fought earlier.

His hands began to tremble at the sight of the ferocious Minotaurs that had lost their reasoning due to the Berserk state they had been forced into.

Relying solely on their wild instincts, the two dozen Silver Tier-1 Minotaurs rushed ahead while brandishing the gigantic weapons they wielded.

On the other hand, the Minotaur leader in red stared intently at Dilan with its bloodthirsty eyes. It had yet to move but the ground below its feet started to crack when the Minotaur prepared itself to charge ahead.

Dilan's eyes turned serious the moment the first Minotaur showed signs of attacking. Adrenaline coursed through his body and he activated [Thunder Step] followed by [Second Acceleration].

This time, he didn't hesitate to activate [Second Acceleration] at its full potential.

Both agility-boosting abilities would become a burden if used together, and their mana consumption would clearly skyrocket.

However, the amplification he received was more than enough for him to reach an Agility higher than any of his opponents could attain.

After crossing 100 Units in his Agility, Dilan slashed the serpent form of the Blazing Serpentine Blade at the ferocious Minotaurs, who charged at him without hesitation..

Their speed was not slow, by any means. However, they were simply too slow against Dilan.

Dashing forward with all his might, Dilan reached the closest Minotaur a fraction of a second later.

The Blazing Serpentine Blade he had already slashed at his opponents followed his movements, changing its trajectory in an instant.

His first attack had been a ruse to cover up his advance to the closest Minotaur.

It worked exactly as he had predicted because the Minotaurs had attempted to destroy the serpent form of the Blazing Serpentine Blade by slashing at it.

They had even accepted to get severely injured just to see their opponent lose his weapon.

In Dilan's opinion that was stupid but he couldn't demand monsters to display a high level of intelligence when they had lost the majority of their reasoning.

Nonetheless, their wild instincts were far more advanced than he could have imagined as the Minotaur he had approached in a fraction of a second had noticed his movements.

His Agility was 60 Units higher than his opponents, reaching a level that was 100 times that of the average human before the Primordial Ascension.

It was near-impossible for anyone to perceive his movements as long as their Agility didn't reach 60 Units at the bare minimum.

However, the wild instincts and the exceptional perception of the Minotaurs allowed them to achieve this.

Moving quickly, the Minotaur he had targeted tried to block the attack that was about to reach it.

Yet, it was just a second late in perceiving the red flash.

And this second was more than enough for Dilan. The red flash passed by the Silver Tier-1 Minotaur, whose sight blurred.

Moments later its legs began to grow weaker and buckled under the weight of its body. Not long after, the monster collapsed on the ground.

Dilan didn't pay much attention to the dying Minotaur. He had no time to do so because the other Minotaurs had already moved as well.

They were able to change their trajectory rapidly in order to attack Dilan with their overwhelming strength and numerical advantage.

Dilan was finding it a bit hard to evade all attacks.

However, thanks to the Blazing Serpentine Blade, the blade's extreme sharpness and accurate slash from Dilan made it not necessary for him to evade the attack of 23 Minotaurs, whose Strength exceeded 60 Units.

His own Strength was not lower than theirs, and by activating [Momentary Strengthening] of the Balrog's leather gloves, Dilan was able to reach a slightly higher Strength than the Silver Tier-1 Minotaurs.

Adding his terrific Agility to the mix, Dilan could turn into a slaughter machine the moment he would break through the defense of his opponents.

But it was just when the second Silver Tier-1 Minotaur was taking its last breaths when Dilan noticed something from the sideline.



'So you're finally joining? Was about time!'

The Gold Tier-1 Minotaur finally took its first step. Fine cracks appeared on the ground around its hooves as the Minotaur leader shot through the highest floor of the Pagoda.

It let out a terrifying roar so as to intimidate the Silver Tier-1 Minotaurs and blasted away to protect them from being sliced apart.

With a simple yet extremely powerful slash, the Gold Tier-1 Minotaur attacked Dilan.

Its Strength exceeded 100 Units and could be perceived instinctively as he sensed that he would die if he wouldn't evade the attack.

Being extremely fast might be exceptionally helpful to defeat opponents with an equal or higher strength but if he failed to block a single attack of a stronger opponent, his extraordinary high Agility was of no use.

'Evade!!' Dilan shouted in his mind as he retracted the serpent form of the Blazing Serpentine Blade.

He pushed his body to the side using every single bit of power within him.

In the end, his fast Agility allowed Dilan to evade the Minotaur's attack. Its black sword cut through the air, devastating the surroundings easily.

The drafts of wind created by the Minotaur's powerful slashes blasted into Dilan's face, forcing him to close his eyes to avoid letting dust and debris enter his eyes.

Retreating rapidly, Dilan reached the other side of the room in an instant.

With his eyes half-open, he was still able to see everyone. However, this included the red Minotaur, whose reflexes exceeded the ordinary limits of an existence with an Agility lower than 100 Units.

Its reaction speed was barely slower than Dilan's, making things difficult for him but he was not going to give up easily.

Blazing flames engulfed the Serpentine Blade in its original form.

His body was leaning forward a bit as he blasted toward the Minotaur at breakneck speed.

It didn't take a quarter of a second before they emerged in front of each other.

The Minotaur initiated another attack, ready to split Dilan into two.

However, Dilan quickly moved to the side before he jumped toward the Minotaur.

He activated [Mana Slash] with more than ten Mana units, and was ready to enlarge the Blazing Serpentine Blade as he lashed out with it.

That way he planned to eliminate the Minotaur before it could even move.

His attack had to be strong enough to break through the Minotaur's neck because he was not confident of piercing through its skull.

But even before his piercing attack reached the Minotaur, its body twisted, causing horrifying sounds of bones cracking to resound in Dilan's ear as the minotaur evaded his attack even before it was fully issued.

Simultaneously, the Minotaur leader's empty hand had turned into a fist that wanted to punch Dilan with a rapid speed.

When Dilan saw all of this happening right in front of his eyes, they widened in shock.

[Aegis' Shield]!

A blueish shield manifested right next to Dilan, blocking the path of the high-velocity punch that would have hit Dilan's abdomen from the side, probably breaking several ribs and possibly rupturing his internal organs.

Nonetheless, the shield was just a single layer of protection...a powerful layer of protection but that was it.

It didn't save him from the impact that flung Dilan more than a dozen meters through the air. He thrashed into the wall of the Pagoda's highest floor and landed on the ground a moment later.

Blood trickled out of his mouth but he was not able to rest even for a millisecond.

'Fuck it.' He could only think, understanding once again that he had underestimated the strength of monsters.

Not all of them were powerful, and not all of them were weak. However, the Minotaur Leader was definitely a monster that was different from everything he had fought until today.

Its fighting experience was higher than that of the Eternal Guards, and so was its strength. It used abilities that increased its strength and didn't use its mana for anything else.

However, that was not necessary because its stats had reached a terrifying threshold others wouldn't be able to overcome.

'Is the 15th floor even supposed to be cleared?' Dilan suddenly wondered, feeling that no ordinary Ascender would be able to conquer the Pagoda of Time, not considering that this was the difficulty of a <Solo> raid...

Chapter 214 Equal? Not even close!

Dilan was far from being normal.

He was no ordinary Ascender and knew that using [Bearer of Pain] and [Bracing Pain] to replenish his mana and to amplify his stats would be more than enough to defeat the Gold Tier-1 Minotaur.

Even his Strength would reach the same as the Minotaur's the moment he utilized [Bracing Pain] to its full potential.

But was that really the right way, to always use his occupational abilities to overwhelm his opponents with higher stats? Would that always be helpful to survive the future dangers he was bound to face?

Dilan didn't think so.

It was quite obvious that there would be times when even his strongest state was, at most, on par with his opponent's as he would advance further.

There would also be times when his stats would be lower than the monsters and other beings he faced.

While the latter would be in his favor, the latter would be a disadvantage but was something Dilan couldn't avoid.

'If I cannot rid myself of this bad habit, I might never be able to do so...'

Dilan knew that it was a bad habit to overwhelm his opponents with his high stats. It didn't provide him with as much combat experience as he truly needed.

[True Weapon Specialist] might be a powerful passive ability because it would imprint lots of knowledge and experiences in his mind but that was already it.

His body had yet to get accustomed to fighting like a true master, to exceed his physical limits and fight desperately so as to overcome everything.

Dilan was aware of his problem and the Minotaur Leader in front of him seemed to be the perfect target to figure out his flaws, learn how to fix them and what else he needed to improve.

'One minute. If I cannot figure out anything in one minute, I'll finish the Minotaur with my brute force!'

One minute might not be long but [Second Acceleration] would wear off afterward. He would have to use his mana in an unrestrained manner in the one-minute-long fight as well.

Thus, he couldn't reactivate [Second Acceleration] once it had worn off. This would force him to use [Bearer of Pain] to replenish his Mana.

As a reaction, [Bracing Pain] would amplify him, which would mean that re-activating [Second acceleration] would increase his Agility much more than it was currently doing.

The current condition with which Dilan was fighting could be called perfect. While his Agility was much higher than the Minotaur's, its strength was equally much higher than Dilan's.

Their average stats were more or less similar, which was why tactics, instincts, usage of abilities, and combat experience were currently the most important factors that decided over life and death.

It was perfect and Dilan got up from the ground in an instant before he blasted off.

He rushed toward the left, leaving behind the Minotaur leader, who had almost caught up with him before.

It roared out in anger and pursued Dilan while closing the distance between them by taking shortcuts through the inner area of the Pagoda's highest floor.

Dilan had already expected the Minotaur leader to close its distance to him.

However, while focusing on him, the Minotaur leader didn't even realize that the other Silver Tier-1 Minotaurs were also charging at Dilan.

The Minotaur Leader rushed some of them over, providing Dilan the opportunity to finish them off in a clean slash of his blade.

Using the serpent-form of the Blazing Serpentine Blade allowed him to utilize many complex maneuvers, and attack monsters that were not located in the first row.

His Agility was shockingly high, and his surprise attack was ruthless and precise. The Silver Tier-1 Minotaurs were unable to block his attack.

The Minotaurs he attacked were killed in an instant. They were not even able to issue a single noise before they slumped to the ground.

This sound attracted the attention of many Minotaurs but they couldn't understand what was going on because their mind was not working rationally owing to their Berserk state's influence.

It prevented them from realizing that Dilan's attack pattern had changed and that he was not fighting openly anymore.

He was using small and devious attacks to either injure his opponents or to finish them off, silently and neatly.

While rushing through the Pagoda's highest floor, Dilan killed more than 8 Silver Tier-1 Minotaurs before he was forced to face the Minotaur leader head-on.

Luckily, by then, Dilan had come up with a tactic to face the powerful strike of the Tier-1 Minotaur head-on.

As it slashed out at him with its terrifying strength, he was unable to hide his smile.

It was a sly smile that spoke volumes about the cruelty of his plan.

But being cruel was not something new for Dilan. He slashed the Blazing Serpentine Blade at his opponent while twisting his body.

Using the large blade as a shield, he tried to deflect the Minotaur leader's attack while simultaneously averting it slightly to prevent being cut in half.

Dilan could have evaded it completely but this would have allowed the Minotaur leader to issue a second attack not long after its first attack.

To prevent a subsequent attack that he wouldn't be capable of defending, Dilan forcefully averted the Minotaur leader's attack with most of his weapon's body.

While the lower body of the Serpentine blade was in the longsword form to allow him to wield it properly, the upper part and the tip were still in the serpentine form.

They were coiled around the Minotaur leader's sword-arm's wrist, where their razor-sharp edges dug into.

After Dilan had enhanced the Blazing Serpentine Blade's endurance and sharpness using one of the highest quality whetstones, he was not afraid of seeing it break, or that it might not be sharp enough to cut through his opponent's hide.

While blocking the Minotaur's attack, he simultaneously issued an attack, cutting deep into the Minotaur's wrist before burning everything.

It was not neat, but Dilan felt that the Minotaur's strength behind its attack was gradually decreasing.

This gave him the chance to issue a follow-up attack.

The Minotaur was currently roaring out in anger and pain, and its high-pitched whining caused a painful ache in Dilan's ear.

He tried to ignore it as much as possible, leaned his body forward, and retracted the remaining part of the Blazing Serpentine Blade before shooting forward.

Meanwhile, as he blasted ahead, the Minotaur's sword slashed into the ground, while the arteries of its wrist had been cut through.

Blood spurted through the surroundings, and splattered on Dilan's face but he kept his sky-blue eyes wide open as he slashed at the Minotaur while passing by it.

However, instead of attacking its chest or any vital spot that might kill it instantaneously, Dilan cut through the Minotaur's left leg.

But his attack was far from over as he passed by the Minotaur. Blasting out with the serpent form of the Blazing Serpentine Blade the moment he reached the Minotaur, its razor-sharp blades dug deep in both calves of the monster's legs.

A moment later the Minotaur was forced to the ground as its legs couldn't carry its heavy weight anymore.

Yet, even after that attack, Dilan didn't think of slowing down.

The Blazing Serpentine Blade whipped through the air, cutting through the Minotaur's thigh, eyes, and elbow in a matter of seconds.

Meanwhile, Dilan's eyes steeled as a faint smile formed on his lips.

'So that's what the [True Weapon Specialist] really means?'

Chapter 215 Price to pay!

The Minotaur leader was not yet dead.

In fact, Dilan barely destroyed one of its eyeballs while the other eye was barely injured.

It was not severely damaged but its vision was now slightly restricted.

As for the other wounds, they were not as deep as first imagined.

The Minotaur had not been on par with Dilan during the last few minutes.

However, this was mostly due to the difference in their equipment, or to be precise, the advantage Dilan gained from wielding the Blazing Serpentine Blade.

Wielding the Blazing Serpentine Blade properly was extremely difficult but Dilan was capable of doing so.

Thus, he could continue inflicting minor injuries on the Minotaur leader, so as to wear it out and force it to succumb to its fate.

But even after forty seconds had passed the Minotaur leader was still alive.

While attacking the leader head-on, Dilan had also issued attacks on the side to cause lethal injuries to the remaining Silver Tier-1 Minotaurs circling them.

They were no problem for Dilan to handle, not with his Agility exceeding 100 Units.

Only 20 seconds were left before he could finish getting to know his flaws, and figure out how to fix them and how to improve.

His biggest flaw was the quite obvious fact that he relied too much on stats. Fixing this was quite difficult because it was a bit difficult to find opponents with higher stats than him..

And even if he found them, they would be extremely dangerous, meaning that his life would be in danger.

But fighting in a suicidal and reckless way was not something Dilan was afraid of. That was also why he used the last 20 seconds to fight the Minotaur head-on, and not to evade its attacks before using the serpent form of the Blazing Serpentine Blade to fight.

Clashing with the Minotaur head-on, Dilan was quickly pushed back. The Minotaur might have grown weak owing to the various injuries it had sustained but its Strength stat was still at 100 Units which was much higher than Dilan's.

He was forced to retreat, nearly cleaved in half, and killed, just like that. [True Weapon Specialist] might be powerful but all the experiences and memories he gained from it hadn't seeped into his body.

That was at least how Dilan looked at the situation as he knew what he had to do but his body took a fraction of a moment too long to make the complex set of movements his brain wanted him to do.

It made things much clearer for him and his movements became smoother the more time passed.

He escaped death by hair's breadth several times, which would be terrifying and fear-inducing under normal circumstances.

However, instead of being afraid, Dilan smiled brightly. His eyes were gleaming, as they were analyzing his every move and picking up flaws while simultaneously the movements of his opponents.

By now, Dilan had figured out the Minotaur leader's rather simple attack pattern.

Through this, it was possible for Dilan to launch a counterattack after he deflected a sequence of more than five slashes and strikes.

The Blazing Serpentine Blade was still unscathed, but Dilan's arm but a numbing pain was spreading through it because of the impact he had to endure from every attack he had blocked.

Nonetheless, it was possible for him to issue a fully empowered counterattack.

He didn't use any abilities other than the already activated [Thunder Step] and [Second Acceleration] as he emerged next to the Minotaur Leader.

Its sword stuck the ground while its free arm was right next to Dilan.

As it was unable to twist its arm to attack him with the free arm, Dilan pushed his body up in the air. He inserted a large amount of mana in the Blazing Serpentine Blade that was shrouded in a thick layer of compressed flames.

This consumed a major chunk of his inserted Mana but Dilan wanted that to happen as the compressed blazing flames increased the lethality of his attack.

A fiery red flash whizzed past the Minotaur leader's head while Dilan was in the air. With a seemingly simple yet accurate slash he had cut through the Minotaur's neck, and neatly sliced through the thick muscles, arteries, and veins.

The smell of charred flesh filled the air as the Blazing Serpentine Blade set ablaze the injury he had just inflicted.

However, that was not all as the blazing flames began to burn into the wound, while simultaneously burning the monster's head.

Seconds passed in which Dilan distanced himself from the Minotaur leader, who was roaring out in unbearable pain.

He had killed the remaining Silver Tier-1 Minotaurs and waited for the death of the Gold Tier-1 minotaur, who had been an extremely tough opponent to defeat.

Dilan didn't rely solely on his abilities and the enhancement he received from his abilities but he still figured that there was a lot for him to learn.

'I still have a lot to learn and to understand...'

Despite his grueling battle, Dilan was not physically tired after the fight. However, his mental strength had drained quite a bit. He collected the Essence crystals of all monsters but didn't absorb them yet.

He wanted to see if he could get a good deal with the Essence crystals, instead of earning one or two status points.

While collecting the Essence crystals, Dilan ignored the messages which he received.

Thus, he didn't even see that an entirely new, yet somewhat familiar emblem had appeared in his Log of the Ancient.

A Symbol with a black circle that surrounded the head of a Minotaur could be seen in his Log of the Ancient, appearing out of nowhere.

Meanwhile, the Symbol that had led Dilan to the Sacred Shop had already disappeared but that was something that was obvious to happen.

[Pagoda of Time has been conquered. The 15th Floor has been cleared successfully. 100 Dungeon Points will be granted.]

[<Solo> raid of Pagoda of Time has ended, 15 Floors have been cleared. 15 new records has been set up.]

[Pagoda of Time has been conquered with a new record on each floor. In total, the participant managed to set 8 'Grandiose', 6 'Excellent', and 1 'Good' records. 2800 Dungeon points will be granted.]

[Because the participant was the first one to encounter the Pagoda of Time, Dungeon points will be doubled. 5800 Dungeon Points have been added to the participant's balance.]

The notifications were quite helpful. A mechanical voice in his mind read the notification out loud, which was how Dilan noticed that the voice was different from the one he had heard a few times before.

'Is my mind playing tricks with me or does it feel like the notifications are different than usual?' Dilan was not sure if he was just imagining things or if he noticed something impressive.

In the end, he merely shrugged his shoulders before averting his focus to something else.

He opened the Log of the Ancient, saw the Minotaur symbol, pressed on it and saw a shop similar to the Sacred Shop.

[Dungeon Shop]

[Permission to one Basic Dungeon Shop has been granted. <Taurus the Mighty>]

The shop's name was quite weird, but Dilan didn't give it much thought.

He simply believed that the Pagoda of Time was created by someone who adored Minotaurs. Even if there was more behind it, there was no reason for Dilan to start researching anything.

With the points at his disposal, he could purchase quite a bit. Each Dungeon Point was more valuable than the Sacred Points they had previously received from sacrificing monster corpses.

That meant he could purchase lots of things with the points he procured.

But instead of wasting them, Dilan chose to save them up, potentially to purchase something of exceptional use when he would have the time to research the shop's goods.

However, for now, there was no time because Dilan wanted to leave the Pagoda of Time.

The others had to get to know that the Pagoda of Time existed. It was an exceptional place that was worth entering and honing one's combat skills.

What Dilan didn't expect was to see that it was already in the middle of the night when he left the Pagoda of time.

From the looks of it, midnight had already passed as well.

This was...wrong!

"Why is it already dark? The moon is up? But it should be afternoon right now..."



Dilan was pretty sure that his sense of time was not wrong. He could also roughly gauge the time he had required to clear each of the Floors. Adding them together in addition to a few minutes here and there, it should be early evening at the latest.

“I was only four or five hours in the Pagoda of Time...and I entered it around lunchtime. How is it possible for the day to be over already?? Why does it look like the moon is already going under? Is it the next morning? HOW?”

Dilan was visibly confused but standing around wouldn't help him either.

That was why he left the Pagoda while noticing its exact position. The current situation was quite weird but Dilan was still pretty sure that the Pagoda of Time was exceptional and he had made good use of his time.

His team and other survivors could get their hands on high-quality Essence crystals, excellent training partners, great treasures, and Dungeon Points.

Others might not get as many Dungeon Points as Dilan received, even less because it would be quite hard to break his record but that was more than fine. The <Duo>, or <Group> mode for the Pagoda of Time raid should still have their records a bit easy enough to break.

Yvonne and the others were strong enough to surpass their limits and set new records.

‘The Pagoda of Time is quite useful. But it is weird that time passed so fast...wait!? Time...Pagoda of Time...Time passed so fast...fast...accelerated...or slowed down?!’

At that moment, Dilan believed that he figured out what exactly the Pagoda of Time demanded in exchange for providing the opportunity to kill thousands of powerful monsters, earn numerous treasures, and so on.

“What...if the Pagoda of Time does not only note down your combat skills but that the time inside it runs slower as well? One hour in the pagoda is three hours outside...”

“Is it possible for the Pagoda to take time as payment for entering it? Something like that?”

Dilan was quite shocked. In his opinion, the Pagoda of Time took away three times the time he had actually been inside it, meaning that the time inside it passed four times slower than on the outside world.

One hour inside the Pagoda of Time roughly translated into three to four hours in the real world!

Chapter 216 Trading hub?

Dilan knew that he had been quite fast when rushing through the Pagoda of Time. Despite that, the majority of his day had been eaten up, just like that.

If others were to enter the Pagoda of time, or he would enter it with more Ascenders, they were bound to take much longer.

In the end, it was not unlikely for one or two days to pass outside the Pagoda of Time before they would have conquered the Instance dungeon.

During that period lots of unexpected incidents could happen, which was what Dilan kept worrying about as he shared the information which he had procured with the others. He wanted to leave no detail and gave an elaborate recounting of his experience.

He had returned not too long ago, and only a few higher-ups of his group were still awake.

But when reporting everything, Dilan made sure to highlight the fact that the Pagoda of Time was likely to be a great opportunity for Ascenders as well.

Their level would rise quickly, and so would their combat prowess, status points, the number of treasures they would get their hands on, and much more, such as ability crystals.

Paying a price in exchange for all of this was only normal, which was why Dilan thought highly about the Pagoda of Time.

‘Who cares if they store information on my combat skills and style, or take some of my time? If the benefits outweigh the disadvantages I will accept it, period!’

Oliver, whom he had found first when he returned to their base, was quite excited after he heard Dilan’s report.

He wanted to enter the Instance Dungeon right off the bat. However, Oliver’s level was higher than Dilan’s, meaning that he would have to face even stronger opponents than the strongest Ascender in their group.

“What do you think? Will I be able to clear more than five floors if I were to decide to try clearing the floors all by myself?”

Ordinary Tier-1 monsters at his level usually didn’t have any abilities. Their average stats were also on the lower side, and so was their combat experience.

That was how it was usually the case. Thus, Oliver didn’t think that it would be impossible for him to clear the first four floors of the Pagoda of Time.

But Dilan didn’t seem to think the same as Oliver.

“I’m actually not sure how many floors you will be able to clear all by yourself. Your stats might be higher but all the monsters in the Pagoda of Time tend to work together to make up for that disadvantage. I simply overwhelmed them but you don’t have any means to attack numerous monsters simultaneously.

But your Agility and abilities are quite helpful, so that shouldn’t be a problem. The only issue is that the monsters in the Pagoda of Time have a quite high combat awareness, which is why the occupational abilities of your Assassin occupation might be countered by them.”

Dilan was well versed with the abilities of his people. While he had been searching for ways to upgrade his abilities, he had asked the others if they could share information about upgrading their abilities with him.

It was always better to work together while doing research because there might be cases, when someone's ability upgraded in a unique way, or when they had to meet extraordinary conditions to upgrade their ability.

Dilan and many others wanted to find out a rough idea of how to upgrade their abilities in the easiest possible way.

Unfortunately, this was easier said than done because they had yet to figure out the rough template on how to upgrade abilities.

That was also why Dilan knew what abilities Oliver had. Even his occupational abilities were known to him, though it was not possible to upgrade them.

Oliver was not satisfied with the answer Dilan gave. However, he knew that Dilan wouldn't exaggerate or water down something to turn it into a softer blow.

There was no need to hold back from revealing the bitter truth either because his people's life was on the line when he was speaking about dangerous things.

"Just test the first floor of the Pagoda of Time, if you really want to. I believe that you can easily pass the first floor. As for the other floors, you will probably need some time to clear them. Just enter it without feeling rushed and you'll be fine."

Dilan wanted his people to grow, so he shouldn't discourage them. Life was not supposed to be safe anymore and Oliver would have to face dangerous situations in order to grow stronger and tougher.

And it was not only Oliver. Every single Ascender and even Survivor would have to face the cruel reality every now and then to understand that being alive had become a privilege and that everyone had to work hard to stay alive.

With that in mind, he continued to speak with Oliver a little before the young Ascender left, and Dilan retired to bed to sleep for a few hours.

It was still early in the morning when he woke up again. It was noisy in the factory and everyone was busy working.

The sight of all Survivors and Ascenders working hard was great and it made Dilan hurry up to take a quick shower and wear a clean set of clothes.

Meeting with the others, he once again recounted his experience of the Pagoda of Time, astonishing Kathrine, Yvonne and the others as he took out the Whetstones, the ability crystals, and the pieces of equipment he got his hands on after clearing the dungeon just once.

"That's great...we were quite worried because you didn't return when you told us that you would be back," Kathrine stated gloomily, but before she could continue, Sven jumped into their conversation and switched the topic.

"We found two permanent Gates in Shiron's center and more than 10 permanent Gates close to Shiron's outskirts. One of the Scouting groups also mentioned that they saw how two temporary Gates disappeared after they released more than a hundred Tier-1 monsters.

The information about the 12 permanent Gates, the monsters inside the city, their territory, and numbers have been mentioned in the report as well.

There is also another report about the monsters outside the city, their strength, and so on.”

Sven gave him three reports, of which two were the ones mentioned before.

“What about the third report?” Dilan asked, holding up the papers.

This time Sarah answered with a bright expression.

“We decided to create a trading hub in the factory. There are many Ascenders, who are in need of special Essence crystals to upgrade their abilities, and several more, who desire to get their hands on more ability crystals, equipment, and so on.

That is why we want you to make the final decision on the proposal I and a few others have come up with. Our society could grow much faster with what we created. At least, that is my opinion.”

Dilan noticed Sarah’s excitement and read through the files of the third report.

‘Oh? That doesn’t sound bad...’

“So instead of giving treats to the hard-working Ascenders, you want them to first work hard so that they’ll earn their treats afterward?

We supply resources and they can be exchanged by completing certain missions, selling Essence crystals, equipment, and ability crystals.

Instead of a trading hub, it’s more like an allrounder Shop, where you can also barter the items you want. The only issue here is that we don’t have a special currency.

I guess you want to turn neutral Essence crystals into the currency of the shop, by considering the quality and Tier of the Essence crystals’ value. That would probably fluctuate based on the given supply and demand at that time.”

Dilan liked the idea of creating such a trading hub. Calling it as such might not fit perfectly but that was not important. Sarah’s idea was good, and by making sure that there would be enough treasures, ability crystals, special items, and Essence crystals to simplify the process of purchasing and selling goods, it would work out quite well.

Nonetheless, Dilan had previously believed that it would be too early to do something like this. The moment they demanded one person to pay for something they had received before for free, it would be necessary to demand the same from everyone else.

The best example would be Old Jeff and the process of him manufacturing weapons for the Ascenders. If he had to purchase the ores to forge a weapon, he would have to sell the weapon forged from the same ores he previously purchased.

Ascenders, who required the forged weapon to protect themselves and others would have to buy weapons, which would be difficult if they wouldn’t earn anything as Guards of their group’s new home.

They would only be able to earn by killing monsters but if their task was to protect, they deserved to receive a daily base fee so that they would be able to purchase the weapons they needed or buy food.

Food was also an issue in that regard. Dilan had promised that nobody would have to work but that they wouldn't receive much if they didn't do anything, just a place to sleep and enough food to survive and to stay energized to some extent.

This included some food, meaning he would have to give it out for free.

'If we provide the plainest and most simple food for free, I could ask Bianne to make better and more nutritious food for those who pay. But...are we already ready to recreate a proper exchange system based on money, right now?'

Dilan was not sure about that, so he could frown for now.

His initial thought was that it would be a great idea to make everyone work to earn something, just as it had been in the past.

However, reality made it quite difficult and after they had just found a new home, they had to make quite a few preparations for everything to work out perfectly fine.

Sven noticed the changes in Dilan's expression, and he could understand what his boss was worried about.

"I think that her plan is good as well, however I believe that it's too early to be implemented for now. But I can think of a way to solve all the issues. This may take some time but for now, we can announce that we will implement a monetary system soon and put out feelers."

Chapter 217 Favor

217: Favor

[Red River Mountain, Tier-1 Level 20]

[Silvergrass Plains, Tierless Level 10]

[Mythical Forest, No requirements]

[Bluestar Ocean, Tier-2 Level 5]

[Mountain Ring of the Elements, Tier-1 Level 10]

[Goblin Liar, Tierless Level 3]

[Swamp of the Lamia Queen, Tier-1 Level 18]

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As he read through the list of permanent Gates that had been found, Dilan grew slightly worried about a few of them.

From his experience, Gates would cause monster tides every now and then.

That was how it had been with the Krendel's Underground Valley..

The monster tides that would emerge out of the permanent Gates with the highest requirements to enter should be quite dangerous, which was why Dilan had told the Scouts to pay attention to them.

He had to become stronger quickly and intended to enter the Pagoda of Time once again, at best using the <Duo>, <Team>, or <Group> mode.

While Duo was self-explanatory, the Team mode required 5 participants to enter the Pagoda of Time at the same time.

Meanwhile <Group> spoke about a group of 10 Ascenders entering the Pagoda of Time at once.

Dilan wanted to get his hands on as many Dungeon Points as possible, which was why he had to break the records that had been set up by the Pagoda of Time.

For now, breaking his own records would be quite annoying because he wasn't sure of surpassing his previous achievements. With that in mind, he didn't want to waste his time and decided to go on a <Solo> raid.

He still had a few hours left with his increased drop rate and doubled Dungeon points.

One raid of the Pagoda of Time was still possible, and the only question was, who he should enter the Pagoda of Time with.

Everyone was busy and was gearing up for the challenge. A few Ascenders had already formed groups to enter the Pagoda of Time to figure out the actual difficulty of the Instance Dungeon.

Dilan's report might be quite helpful but he couldn't precisely determine the dangers of the first 10 floors. The speed at which he conquered the floors using his overwhelming combat prowess and overpowering stats didn't allow him to make accurate assumptions of how his team would fare when faced with the same challenge.

Yvonne was amongst the Ascenders, who wanted to test out the Pagoda of Time. She was searching for new pets to use with her Origin ability [Angel of Death], and bipedal monsters such as Minotaurs were definitely a good choice.

From what she had heard, they were exceptional melee fighters, which further fueled her to try getting her hands on some Minotaur corpses to control them whenever necessary.

Oliver, Ailee and a few others were also out, probably completing some tasks. Thus, Dilan picked Kathrine to join him, after he had finished his discussion with Sarah, and Sven, who were both equally interested in the trading hub idea.

Dilan liked it as well but he was actually not good at planning stuff. His management skills were below-average and he didn't have time to think about a properly working system with which the majority of Survivors would be satisfied.

Others could focus on the troublesome administrative tasks while he would become stronger and be the first one to explore anything to determine whether it was too dangerous for the others to enter or not.

'It's good to have competent workers.' Dilan thought with a smile as he turned his attention to Kathrine.

"How about we enter the Pagoda of Time? It should be quite good for you as well. We will be able to procure quite a few treasures and can determine the danger level...though, if possible I wish to rush through the Instance Dungeon so that we can get more Dungeon Points for breaking the records set up by the Pagoda of Time."

Dilan spoke in an excited tone, and it was different than his usual way where he only spoke the bare minimum. The change in his behavior stupefied Kathrine for a moment.

However, it didn't take her long to calm down as she nodded her head. She was not sure what to say right now because her heart was thumping wildly.

Kathrine thanked her past self for not rushing into the Pagoda of Time and to work on something else instead. It had allowed her to get an invitation from Dilan and to spend some time with him alone.

Even if they would just hunt monsters, and slaughter them mercilessly, Kathrine was content with that as long as he was by her side.

She nodded her head once again while answering in a barely audible voice, "I have time."

In reality, Kathrine didn't have time and was overflowing with workload because hundreds of members of the Porter Unit needed to be managed.

Others had long since started to manage the Porter Unit but Kathrine had to help the managers right now in ensuring that they did not mess up.

Having migrated to a new place where everything seemed foreign to them and not constructed in the way they needed it, many Survivors felt lost about what to do.

If they were able to think of a solution on their own, they would simply do whatever they believed to be correct.

However, it was important that they had everybody's consent with respect to their decision and opinion because their work was not only for themselves but for everyone to live comfortably.

Dilan was glad that Kathrine had some time to spare for him. He roughly knew her abilities, how high her average stats were, along with her strengths and weaknesses.

Having a dependable partner would make it easier for him to conquer the Pagoda of Time in less time.

Yet, before entering the Instance Dungeon, Dilan wanted Kathrine to help him with something he had hesitated to do before as he had been in a weakened state.

"Kathrine, can you do me another favor?" He asked when they had left the toy factory. They were on their way to the Pagoda of Time and Kathrine was beaming, happy to have some time alone with Dilan.

"Of course, I can help you!" She immediately blurted out, before cursing herself in her mind.

'Calm down girl! You don't even know what favor he needs...'

Taking a deep breath, Kathrine calmed down. She didn't even know when she had begun to look at Dilan differently. However, her interest in him had become more apparent to herself the more time passed.

It was weird because she had actually never felt interested in men. Only her family had been important to her and nobody else.

Of course, there had been many men trying to hit on her every now and then, but Kathrine blocked their approaches coldly and without hesitation.

Yet, somehow she was opening the doors of her heart for Dilan who was oblivious to it. First of all, he was not fazed by the beautiful woman in his group. He never approached them without reason, he didn't have any lustful thoughts about them, and he never laid hands on any beauty in his group even if he was the strongest of them all.

Not many would be like him with the kind of power Dilan had.

There were also more than enough beautiful women, who would find it an honor to be his romantic partner even before the words tumbled out of his mouth.

They knew that there would be no worry about safety, food, and enough resources to potentially become stronger as long as they belonged to Dilan.

However, the last thing Dilan could be bothered about was to have someone by his side to have some pleasure at night.

Other things were far more important, such as becoming stronger and resting when it was required.

Sleeping with random women just because nobody could stop him was a waste of time and pointless so he could simply postpone it.

After all, it was not as if he couldn't control his lust and desires. That was quite easy, even more so after the Primordial Ascension had occurred.

This was actually weird because most men and women had to face serious issues since the Primordial Ascension happened.

All Ascenders had grown more sensitive to the emotions they felt, they had mood swings quite often and it was hard for them to hide their feelings.

In the past, it was common to hide your emotions, whether you disliked your superior, or if you have romantic feelings for someone.

However, this had become quite difficult to do since the Essence one absorbed seemed to increase not only one's physique in terms of Agility, Stamina, Strength, and Health but it also added something new, Mana.

The jury is still out on whether it was the Essence or the existence of Mana that increased the emotions and sensitivity toward everything and made people hyper-aware of their five senses.

But it was a fact that the higher an Ascenders' level, the more difficult it was for them to hide their true feelings, good or bad, murderous or filled with peace.



Suppressing them completely was quite difficult, which was how one could tell whether a person was innately good or bad. Dilan nourished the good and paid more attention to the 'bad' people, so as to find out more about them.

Kathrine was a good person, who had focused on protecting her sister in the past. Now that Yvonne didn't need her protection anymore as her strength exceeded Kathrine's, she focused on protecting the weak, and helping them in every possible way.

However, even she had problems suppressing some emotions, such as her true feelings toward certain people.

Kathrine didn't really like Williams, Sven, and Xenia because they had once led a gang. It might only be a prejudice that people including her had against gangs but they were certainly not known for being peaceful.

That was also why she didn't believe that the Shepherds gang had been all that nice in the past, even if Williams and the others were evidently trying their best to support Dilan.

This was something she couldn't overlook, which was why her dislike against them had diminished quite a bit already.

But that was actually not the biggest problem. Rather, it was her growing feelings for Dilan. She felt that there was something more than being friends between them.

But then again, Kathrine didn't even know whether Dilan looked at all of them as friends, or that all of them were just baggage, tools, or something else to him.

It was impossible for them to look at Dilan's deepest thoughts which bothered Kathrine the most.

Thus, it was not surprising that she was utterly dumbfounded when she found out what favor he wanted from her.

"I want you to strike me with the full force of your lightning!"

Chapter 218 Struck by Lightning

"I want you to strike me with the full force of your lightning!" Dilan stated with a faint smile on his face.

He was actually not looking forward to being struck by a bolt of lightning but he wanted to test something.

"W-Why would I do that? No!" Kathrine immediately rejected, before halting in her tracks in the middle of the street.

She threw him a puzzled look, not understanding what had made him think of such a reckless idea. Dilan had expected a similar reaction but he quickly cleared her doubts.

"Don't worry, your bolts of lightning won't kill me. I'm not even sure if they will be strong enough to enter my body because of my Stone Skin trait and my high Health stat.

I just want to test out if I can upgrade my [Thunder Step] ability after being struck by a bolt of lightning. It may be one of the requirements to upgrade the ability. That is if my gut feeling is not completely wrong, otherwise, I will just be a little bit zapped through.”

Dilan kept smiling at her, trying to ease Kathrine’s mind. However, she was still against the idea of attacking Dilan.

Unfortunately, he was persistent and kept convincing her so much that she had to give up after they debated for a good 10 minutes.

“Ok Ok, I’ll do it. Just don’t die on me, alright?” Kathrine felt bothered by Dilan’s nonchalant behavior whenever he spoke about injuring himself.

It was as if he didn’t even care the slightest bit about his well-being. During the last few weeks, there hadn’t been more than four days when he was not overly exhausted, severely injured, in a weakened state, or something similar to all of it combined.

This was truly bothersome, especially for people, who genuinely cared about him.

They didn’t want to see him like this, which was only obvious.

However, Kathrine could also understand why Dilan felt the need to become stronger. The Red Dragon’s appearance was something that had struck fear in her heart, and Kathrine knew that all of them would have died if the Red Dragon would have shown even the slightest interest in them.

It was not unlikely that many similar powerful existences such as the Red Dragon had descended on Milarn. There wouldn’t be many of such monsters, otherwise, Milarn would have long since been overtaken by them but the possibility of a few hibernating somewhere could not be ruled out.

That was also why Kathrine, her sister, and many other Ascenders had wanted to enter the Pagoda of Time, despite the apparent danger of possibly dying, and the fact that time passed much faster outside the Pagoda of Time than within.

‘If you’re happy after being struck by my lightning, I will help you...’ Kathrine thought, trying to convince herself that she was doing the right thing.

Activating [Compressed Lightning Strike], the Tier-1 ★★ ability that had evolved from the [Lightning Strike] when advancing to Tier-1, Kathrine used more than 15 Mana at once.

A huge bolt of lightning manifested right in the center of Kathrine’s palms. Charging her attack, an entire second passed before she released the powerful bolt of lightning, aiming straight at Dilan’s chest.

Her attack’s velocity was as fast as a natural bolt of lightning, which was why Kathrine closed her eyes the moment she fired her bolt of lightning.

She could clearly hear Dilan’s muffled grunt before he turned quiet. For several seconds, not a single noise could be heard, except the crackling sound of the bolt of lightning’s remnants that lingered on the ground and Dilan’s clothes.

Kathrine opened her eyes slowly, just to see that Dilan was still standing at the same position as before, seemingly unfazed by what had happened.

“Did you really use your Lightning strike in its strongest form?” He asked, feeling slightly confused.

A hole had been burned in his shirt, but there was nothing else.

‘I did not even wear the Ilran Chestplate so as to lower my Health stat and to let the lightning strike hit me directly...and it’s still not enough?’

“I used 15 Mana with my Tier-1 attack...my occupation’s special trait [Lightning blessing] enhances lightning attributed attacks as well. Even Silver Tier-1 monsters cannot survive this attack....Not just Silver but even Gold Tier-1 monsters would be severely injured by that attack...”

Kathrine tried to defend herself, to explain the situation to Dilan clearly. It was not as if she had held back...which was why even she was confused about how easily Dilan had blocked her attack.

“Well, I guess my Stone Skin special trait and a Health stat of more than 100 Units are the problem then. Your attack was not enough to meet any of the possible requirements I had in mind for the [Thunder Step] ability.”

Saying so, Dilan entered a deep train of thoughts. He was slightly confused about what they should do now because he felt that they had done everything correctly.

When Kathrine’s bolt of lightning impacted him, he could clearly feel that something about the [Thunder Step] ability was reacting.

The ability was engraved on his soul, or the Essence crystal in his head, and he could clearly feel that there was something about the ability, which he would discover sooner or later. The only thing he would have to do was to keep trying.

“Do you have enough mana to attack me once again? The same way as you did before?” Dilan asked. He got an idea and wanted to test it out.

“I have enough left for one more attack, but that’s it. Afterward, we might not be able to enter the Pagoda of Time. We shouldn’t waste the mana replenishment potions that we have with us... Are you sure that it will help you if I strike you with another bolt of lightning?”

Kathrine didn’t want to waste her mana, let alone the few potions they had. She was not sure how helpful it would be to attack Dilan once again either.

So she was reluctant to do so.

However, when the Blazing Serpentine Blade emerged in Dilan’s left hand and he cut the palm of his right hand with it until he started to bleed enough to satisfy him, Kathrine realized what he wanted to try this time.

“Are...are you sure that you want to do that?”

Dilan’s Stone Skin trait would be rendered useless if the bolt of lightning penetrated his skin.

Now that he had cut open his palm, only his Health stat that exceeded 100 Units would protect him from the lethal power of Kathrine’s bolt of lightning.

It was great that Dilan could think of a different way to be attacked, but Kathrine knew that the moment her bolt of lightning entered his body that he could die due to severe internal bleeding resulting from ruptured internal organs.

His muscles might tear apart, his flesh was likely to receive severe burns and it was unlikely for Dilan to overcome her attack as easily as before.

Dilan was aware of this. He knew how dangerous lightning was and that one's skin was the most important protection layer when it came to surviving being struck by a bolt of lightning.

However, that was not something he could be bothered about.

"Attack me again, but use only a fifth of the Mana you used before." He commanded. His expression turned grim as he lifted his right hand, the bleeding palm held straight in front of Kathrine.

"O...Ok...Don't die on me, or I'll kill you!"

Chapter 219 Overestimating

Kathrine's heart was beating wildly as she prepared herself for launching another lethal attack.

If she had been certain that Dilan would survive her first bolt of lightning thanks to his high stats, and the Stone Skin trait, her current confidence in Dilan's defenses diminished greatly.

She was worried about severely injuring Dilan but he looked confidently at her as if she was being unnecessarily paranoid.

It made her feel as if she was overreacting even though she knew that she was not.

'The others will definitely kill me if something happens to Dilan... Just why can't he be a little bit more considerate to me?'

Kathrine was frustrated but she didn't show how she felt on the outside. Her heart was beating wildly as the bolt of lightning was forming in her palms.

She cursed inwardly while her attack was charging up, just for Dilan to look at her in amusement.

He was not worried about dying at Kathrine's hand.

Right from the first attack, he knew exactly how powerful her ability was. It was not even close to severely injuring him.

His hand would burn a little and he would sustain some light injuries but that was it.

There was no need for her to be too worried about him. He knew what he was doing and in what kind of situation his group was.

They needed him right now, and he was not supposed to sustain severe injuries that would prevent him from fighting.

'If I cannot upgrade my Origin ability because I don't have the right tools to safely injure myself lethally, I need to become stronger in different ways. I have more than enough other abilities that need my attention as well!' Dilan concluded.

He understood that his mindset was different from others. But it was exactly this mindset that had brought him this far. It had allowed him to become the strong, independent, and the reliable person he was right now.

So he faced Kathrine head-on while keeping a smile on his face to reassure her that everything would be fine.

Once the bolt of lightning was charged up, Kathrine hesitated for a few seconds, took a few deep breaths, and only when she had calmed a little did she release her attack, blasting the bolt of lightning toward Dilan's palm.

They stood less than 30 meters apart from each other. Thus, the bolt of lightning reached its designated target a mere moment later, entering Dilan's body at once.

"Argh!!" Dilan groaned the instant he sensed millions of volts of electricity rush through his veins.

The pain he felt was unbearable but he grit his teeth and endured it.

Upon entering his body, the bolt of lightning devastated his arm as it passed through it before entering the rest of his body.

While his right arm was far more damaged than Dilan expected to be, [Bracing Pain] was activated, increasing his stats in proportion to the severity of the injuries he received.

His stats were amplified, providing him with better protection as the bolt of lightning left his body once it had passed through him.

'Fortunately, I told Kathrine to use a fifth of her power...Looks like I overestimated myself and that I underestimated Kathrine's power,' Dilan thought with a faint smile on his lips.

He was still in pain and had to use his entire willpower to not let it show and make Kathrine worry.

If he were to start crying like a baby that had been injured a little bit, Kathrine would just blame herself.

To lessen his pain, he quickly activated [Regeneration] a few times in succession. Just a moment later, Dilan felt that his body was quickly dispelling the numb sensation that had spread through his entire body.

If he felt as if he had been paralyzed before, the sensation quickly changed as his Origin ability's powerful healing effects were unleashed.

Even if Dilan had known that he would survive Kathrine's attack, he was still a little bit baffled by its lethality.

'As long as Kathrine inflicts the smallest cuts on her opponents, her bolts of lightning will be more than enough to kill her opponents. The only issue is that it takes way too long for her to charge up.'

Dilan tried to ignore the pain in his right arm, but Kathrine forced him out of his train of thoughts.

"I told you that it's too dangerous! Now your entire right arm is wasted, and you won't be able to use it to fight...just why did I listen to you... why are you always so reckless??"

Kathrine blurted out everything that was on her mind. She didn't think for a moment that she was practically scolding him. Right now, Kathrine couldn't care less as she looked at his burned hand and the state of his arm.

Even if one had witnessed Dilan in a bad state, the current condition of his arm looked as if a bulldozer had run over it, if she were to put it simply.

"Don't exaggerate, I don't need my right arm to fight. I don't wield two weapons at the same time either way. My combat power won't decrease just because of a small injury like this one." Dilan waved off his left hand, trying to shrug off her concern.

The Blazing Serpentine Blade was stored in his storage ring, where it was safe, and he could simply use his left arm to wield it.

There was no problem with that.

However, Kathrine seemed to have a problem with that as she pointed her finger straight at his face. Her cheeks were beet-red and it looked like she was about to explode at any moment.

"What the hell are you talking about? 'I don't need my right arm to fight'? Don't kid yourself. I know you're right-handed. So how do you want to fight as proficiently with your left hand as you did with your right?"

And your injury is more than 'little' as well!!"

Dilan's smile didn't cease even after he listened to Kathrine's lecture. He found her behavior quite cute and wanted to keep teasing her.

But she looked genuinely worried about him, so Dilan held back his urge of having a little bit of fun as he cleared one of the misunderstandings Kathrine seemed to have.

"It's just a habit of mine to use my right hand. I was trained, or to be precise, forced to use my right hand from a young age. I'm actually left-handed. You won't notice a big difference in my combat prowess whether I use my right or left hand to fight.

As for my arm, it is really nothing serious. It will be fully healed by tonight."

With that being said, Dilan wanted to end their debate. He had commanded Kathrine to attack him, so there was no need for her to be that worried.

Everything he did had its reasoning. He already had problems injuring himself severely. The Blazing Serpentine Blade was not a tool to injure himself with. Dilan needed a different, stronger, and sharper weapon to keep advancing the [Regeneration] Origin ability.

In the future, he was bound to face many issues in injuring himself lethally, simply because his body, especially his skin were bound to be too tough for ordinary weapons to cause even the slightest injury.

Dilan understood this, which was why he had commanded Kathrine to attack him.

And it had been a good decision by Dilan because he received a notification about the [Thunder Step] ability, just as he had hoped to after a while.

[-[Thunder Step] Tier-0 ★★★-

All upgrade requirements have been met

- 1) Get struck by lightning (2/2)
- 2) Absorb <Lightning> attributed Bronze Essence crystals (5/5)]

[[Thunder Step] Tier-0 ★★★] has been upgraded to [Thunder Step] Tier-0 ★★★★★! Congratulations!]

It was great to see that he was finally able to see the upgrade requirements of the [Thunder Step] ability.

However, it still astonished him that he had already completed one of the requirements before. This was unusual and confused him.

'I know that I've absorbed a few Lightning-attributed Bronze Essence crystals before...but why was that not enough to unlock the upgrade requirements for [Thunder Step]?'

"So even if you meet a certain condition, you might not necessarily be able to see the upgrade requirements? That is annoying..."

This realization made things quite difficult, especially because he couldn't be sure if doing specific things were a sure-shot way to meet the upgrade requirements of his other abilities.

For him and the others, upgrading abilities were going to become more difficult with the new understanding he gained.

Thus, he could only frown while looking at the requirements to upgrade [Thunder Step] once again.

[-[Thunder Step] Tier-0 ★★★★★-

Upgrade requirements

- 1) Get struck by lightning (2/5)
- 2) Absorb <Lightning> attributed Bronze Essence crystals (5/50)]

'The first two times Kathrine struck me with lightning has already been counted. I will have to test that out a few more times. Once Kathrine's mana is full again, she should attack me with the weakest bolts of lightnings to find out if that is enough to be considered as well.

Chapter 220 Greed

Now that Dilan had figured out the upgrade requirements of [Thunder Step], he was quite happy.

After the advancement from a Tier-0 ★★★ to a Tier-0 ★★★★★ ability, the only thing that had changed about [Thunder Step] was that its duration increased by 5 seconds for every Unit of Mana he had used to activate it.

It was not a massive change that allowed Dilan to increase his combat power in an instant but it was still better than nothing.

Kathrine was still bothered about his right arm but when she saw that it took him only a few minutes to move his arm once again, she calmed down.

As long as Dilan was not crippled in any way, everything would be fine, which was what she told herself repeatedly.

Their current plan was to enter the Pagoda of Time once again. That was also what they did without wasting more of their precious time.

While Dilan was still at Tier-1 and Level 9 by now, Kathrine had already reached Tier-1 Level 13.

As long as she absorbed all the Essence crystals they were to procure in the <Duo> raid of the Pagoda of Time, she would cross Level 15 after which she would be forbidden to re-enter the instance dungeon.

But that was not important right now because their plan was different, either way.

"I just need the first four Essence crystals of every new type of monster we kill. Other than that, I think it would be best to accumulate more Essence crystals so that we can test out which permanent Gate provides what kind of treasures." Kathrine had made it clear right from the beginning.

Each permanent Gate provided different treasures in exchange for Essence crystals.

They demanded different numbers of the same type of Essence crystal as well, which was why the Pagoda of Time was also quite useful in this regard.

The same monsters would reappear over and over again, providing more than enough Essence crystals of the same type of monster.

Killing multiple birds with one stone was what Kathrine had in mind by conquering the Pagoda of Time as quickly as possible before they would collect the treasures dropped in the Instance Dungeon.

Following that they would gain more treasures by exchanging the Essence crystals at a different permanent Gate, where they would procure more information about each Gate's exchange system.

Dilan liked her plan, which was why he doubled his efforts to conquer the Pagoda of Time quickly along with her.

The interior of the Pagoda of Time didn't change much after he switched from the <Solo> Modi to the <Duo> Modi.

The floors were just more than twice the size as before and the number of monsters that appeared more than doubled.

Dilan could tell from the beginning of the <Duo> raid that the Pagoda of Time was laid out in a way that demanded bigger groups to work together so that they would be able to reach a combat strength that exceeded each of their individual prowess added together.

He presumed that the Pagoda didn't want 1+1 to equal 2, which would be an ordinary addition. Instead, it wanted them to achieve a strength where 1+1 equals 3!



It was mathematically wrong, but possible if one exchanged each '1' with the combat prowess of an Individual resulting in their combined combat prowess, and what they were actually capable of by working as a team.

There was no need for Dilan and Kathrine to work together in the first 9 Floors.

Dilan could crush all of the ordinary and Bronze monsters around him single-handedly.

He left behind more than enough monsters for Kathrine to kill and to gain more status points. However, it was most important to rush through the floors in the <Duo> mode to receive more Dungeon Points for breaking the previously set record.

Upon reaching the 10th floor, Dilan and Kathrine changed their tactics of clearing the floors. Dilan could kill the Silver Tier-1 monsters with two strikes if he were to focus on one individual.

But instead of focusing on the strongest monsters, he obliterated everyone else, while simultaneously inflicting minor injuries to the stronger monsters.

This didn't actually hurt the monsters but it was more than enough for Kathrine to eliminate them by using her lightning strike with the use of little Mana.

Working together made many things easier, even more so, if one had a partner who could launch a lethal attack.

Dilan was merely using his [Thunder Step] ability to accelerate their speed of clearing the floors.

This made things even easier when they reached the 15th floor after almost four hours had passed.

Using [Thunder Step] with little mana, fully empowering [Second Acceleration], and [Mana Slash] with the remaining mana he had left, Dilan severely injured the three Gold Tier-1 Minotaurs they faced.

Meanwhile, almost all the other monsters simply died, or were lethally injured, and were taking their last breaths.

Dilan created enough ruckus to make the monsters focus on himself and leave Kathrine alone. This allowed her to pick her targets carefully. The strategy worked as she eliminated the three Gold Tier-1 Minotaurs using her [Compressed Lightning strike] three times in succession.

She killed them easily as her highly empowered bolts of lightning pierced into her opponent's flesh due to the injuries they had already sustained at the hands of Dilan.

Through this, they were exhausted once the last battle finished, but it was a successful raid that granted Dilan additional 7500 Dungeon Points.

Meanwhile, Kathrine earned more than 15 Status points, she leveled up once, and the gains they received baffled her extremely.

"So if we were to conquer the Pagoda of Time several times a day, with multiple groups of Elite Ascenders, we will be able to get our hands on hundreds of ability crystals, pieces of equipment, and whetstones...every day?!"

They took quite a while to collect all the Essence crystals and monster drops.

However, once they were done Kathrine was more than just a little bit baffled. She was stupefied about their gains.

Dilan was also quite satisfied and happy but he was also aware of the dangers inside the Pagoda of Time.

“Well, sorry to break your bubble but are you aware of how many Ascenders died inside the Pagoda of Time until now? What do you think...how many of our people must have died?”

Greed was dangerous. It was addictive and intoxicating, and Dilan didn't believe that it was possible to think rationally while being possessed with the desire to obtain something, not if it reached the extent of obsession.

He could tell that Kathrine was not overly greedy and that she was not a materialistic person either. However, even she was beginning to show signs of greed.

She was so happy about the gains they made today that her mind disregarded the fact that the monsters they had faced were extremely powerful.

It was only because of Dilan's extremely high stats and prowess that they didn't face any problems while conquering the entire Pagoda of Time.

Kathrine had received a first taste of the benefits of the Pagoda of Time, and she wanted more. Dilan could tell that. It was not actually hard to perceive this.

The Ascenders, who had entered the Pagoda of Time before Dilan entered it for the second time, had also heard how much he had benefited from the Pagoda of Time.

Thus, many had grown greedy. That was what Dilan believed to have happened, and he would be forced to face the bitter reality just like everyone else had to.

The bitter reality unveiled itself directly in front of Dilan the moment he and Kathrine left the Pagoda of Time.

A few dozen Ascenders were spread out in front of the Pagoda of Time, looking devastated.

Some were staring into the empty space, others were crying while leaning over bodies that had been covered with thin blankets, and another few Ascenders were looking at their blood-smearred and trembling hands in disbelief.

Their adventure to the Pagoda of Time, and the trip they had imagined to be a glorious experience had left them shaken. Their hopes of winning grand and victorious battles against the vile and ferocious monsters had turned out to be a bloody nightmare.

Instead of procuring numerous treasures, death greeted them with wide open arms.

“That's what happens if you allow greed to corrupt your senses if greed is what makes your decisions!”

Dilan looked over the groups of Ascenders. His eyes were cold and he didn't show any empathy to those, who had just been traumatized by the choice they had made.

There was not a single Ascender in front of the Pagoda of Time, who he wasn't familiar with. He knew all of them quite well, but this disappointed Dilan even more as if they were nobodies, trying to make a name for themselves.

All of the Ascenders had been nurtured by him and the others. They had been rewarded with an ability and pieces of equipment, which he had gotten from the Sacred Shop.

He was well aware of the Ascenders' strength, and he clearly knew what they were capable of.

"Greed and arrogance... what a shame, and a waste of precious resources."

"..."