Reincarnated as a Castle - (LitRPG, Kingdom Building, Progression)

chapter 31-40

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Gopuran skewered the thick cuts of steak onto sharpened sticks and settled cross-legged beside the firepit. She slowly turned the meat over the flames, making sure each side was exposed to the heat.

Meanwhile, Gopuro's gaze remained glued to the sizzling steak. His eyes were wide, his mouth slightly open, and a thin trail of drool had already begun slipping from the corner of his lips.

Even Gopuran, disciplined as she tried to be, couldn't fully resist the temptation. Her stomach growled audibly, loud enough to make her ears twitch, and she had to swallow hard to keep herself from snatching a bite while it was still half raw.

Still, she held firm.

She was determined to do this properly.

As the steak cooked, a mouthwatering aroma gradually filled the chamber, rich and savory, with the scent of seared meat and charred fat mingling in the warm air. The fire crackled merrily, and every few seconds, a drop of melting fat dripped into the flames with a sharp hiss, sending tiny bursts of fragrant smoke curling upward.

But after barely two minutes, all restraint crumbled.

The two goblins could wait no longer.

Gopuro moved first, and Gopuran followed right after. Each grabbed a stick and lifted the steak toward their mouths.

Their cheeks puffed out like squirrels as they blew repeatedly on the steaming meat, desperately trying to cool it down as quickly as possible.

The moment the steak was just cool enough to bite, they dug in with completely unrestrained enthusiasm.

Their teeth sank deep into the tender meat, tearing away generous chunks as they chewed.

Instantly, their faces transformed into expressions of pure bliss.

Even as the heat made them wince and blow rapidly between bites, neither of them was willing to stop.

Their eyes squeezed shut as they savored every bite. Both goblins even clutched their cheeks, muffled sounds of delight escaping their throats as their entire bodies practically vibrated with happiness.

Damn, is it really that good?

I watched them, half amused and half incredulous.

It's probably still rare in the middle. I can still see the red.

And there's no seasoning at all.

A proper steak needs salt, pepper, maybe a little herb rub, no?

Yet seeing their sheer joy somehow made my nonexistent mouth water.

Because as a castle, I couldn't eat. I couldn't even taste anything.

Huhu... The unfairness of it all...

Feeling generous, and perhaps a little jealous, I decided to reward their hard work even further.

I materialized several pieces of raw chicken, a generous pile of fresh, crusty bread, and a bucket of cool milk.

The System wouldn't let me purchase milk without something to contain it, so I had ended up buying a wooden bucket from the Furniture Shop first.

The moment they saw the extra food, the goblins' eyes lit up like lanterns.

They barely grilled the chicken before tearing into it, toasted the bread over the fire, and gulped down the milk until their bellies were pleasantly full.

Soon, contented sighs escaped both of them as they leaned back around the fire, thoroughly satisfied.

It was, without exaggeration, an amazing feast.

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Moments later...

With the goblins finally resting, sprawled contentedly near the dying fire, I turned my attention to some rough calculations about the day's productivity.

I had spent 40 Points purchasing Powerstones as quest rewards for the pair, plus another 15 Points on food and water throughout the day.

They were only about the size of large humans, yet somehow, they ate like starving horses.

That brought my total expenditure to a whopping 55 Points.

Ouch.

But on the income side, things looked very positive.

My passive [Generator] skill had granted me another 10 Points automatically. Better yet, the two goblins had brought in a staggering 826 Units of Wood.

If I sold all of it, that would translate into 247.8 Points.

Combined with the Generator income, my total revenue for the day came to 257.8 Points.

After subtracting the 55 Points I had spent on wages and provisions, my net profit came to a tidy 202.8 Points.

Not bad.

I ended up selling 200 Units of Wood for 60 Points, giving me enough spending money to pay and feed my citizens the next day.

The rest, I decided to keep stored in my Inventory as Wood.

There was no reason to convert everything into Points just yet. I might need the material for construction later.

[Points Remaining: 455.8]

[Wood Remaining: 626]

"Not bad at all. Not bad!"

I couldn’t help feeling pleased with myself.

"And what if I have more citizens?"

My imagination immediately started running wild.

I had already begun dreaming.

A hundred... no, a thousand goblins?

I’d be swimming in Points!

I’d be filthy rich!

Therefore, the logical next step was obvious.

I needed to send Gopuro and Gopuran back to their tribe!

They could spread the word about the generous castle lord who offered endless quests, Powerstones, and delicious feasts.

More citizens meant more workers, which meant more resources and more Points. It was practically a self-sustaining cycle.

More importantly, it could help repair my reputation among the wild goblins who still viewed me with suspicion and fear after I had slain so many of their kin.

But before sending them anywhere, I wanted to run a few more experiments with my [Quest Creation] skill.

Specifically, I wanted to test its limits.

What kinds of tasks could I assign? What restrictions were there? How flexible were the rewards? Could I create quests for things other than gathering resources?

There was still a lot I didn’t understand.

This will probably take half a day.

At the same time, I needed to prepare for the arrival of more goblins.

My current accommodations were embarrassingly bare. If I wanted to attract more citizens, I needed to make this place a little more appealing. At the very least, I should provide some basic furniture.

Perhaps with these guys' help, I could also figure out what kind of statue would impress the newcomers?

It could make the castle look far more imposing and help establish an aura of authority.

I also needed to figure out how to keep the birds on my roofs and raccoons living in my basement safe. Perhaps I could create a separate entrance for them so they wouldn't have to pass through the main castle.

And, of course, there were the Points.

Granting citizenship cost Castle Points for each goblin, after all.

"Wait... oh, right!"

I suddenly remembered something.

I still had that in my Inventory.

The corpse of the wolf I'd killed!

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The System was offering a generous 250 Points for the [Gray Horned Wolf carcass]. That was certainly tempting, but I'd instinctively held off on selling it.

Good thing I did.

Because now, I had a much better use for it.

I summoned my [Stone Knife], the one equipped with the [Butchering] skill, and placed it in front of Gopuran.

Previously, every monster corpse I obtained had gone straight to the System for a quick Point conversion simply because I had no way to process them myself.

But now, I had citizens. Capable citizens.

"My girl, you wanted more quests, right?"

"Wood gathering is off the table at night. It’s too dangerous. But how about this instead?"

I created a new quest on the spot and assigned it directly to her.

[Wolf Carcass Dismantling Quest]

For the reward, I set it at 3 Powerstones (F).

I had no idea what useful materials the wolf would yield or how long the task would take, but considering this was essentially an experiment, one Powerstone seemed like a fair starting point.

Gopuran accepted without hesitation.

[Ding!]

[Gopuran has accepted your "Wolf Carcass Dismantling" quest!]

"Alright! Excellent."

I materialized the wolf’s large body right in front of her.

Gopuran immediately grabbed the knife and set to work without hesitation, her small hands moving with surprising confidence as she began processing the carcass.

Gopuro watched from the side.

His eyes narrowed.

There was unmistakable jealousy in his expression.

"Sorry, buddy. I only have one knife with the [Butchering] skill!"

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But then, to my surprise, even without the [Butchering] skill and without any quest assigned, Gopuro jumped in to help anyway.

He pulled out a knife of his own—one he’d apparently been secretly carrying all this time.

Unfortunately, it was utter garbage. The blade was so dull it couldn’t even pierce the wolf’s thick hide properly.

Watching him struggle was painful, so I quickly bought a decent replacement from the Item Shop, handed it over, and slapped a matching quest on him for good measure. It didn't have the [Butchering] skill though, but definitely a sharper knife for him to use.

After all, as a responsible boss, I couldn't just stand by while my employee slaved away for free!

And it turned out to be the right call.

The wolf was enormous—easily the size of a bull—so the sheer volume of work quickly became apparent. Processing it would take far longer and require far more effort than I'd initially expected.

There was also a real risk that Gopuro, lacking the [Butchering] skill, might damage valuable parts. But with Gopuran quietly guiding him... he managed surprisingly well.

That got me thinking...

Hmmm... How exactly do skills function in this world?

Clearly, simply equipping the [Stone Knife] had given Gopuran an instinctive understanding of basic butchering techniques. It was almost like downloaded knowledge. The moment the knife was in her hand, she moved with effortless confidence, like someone who had been butchering wolves her entire life.

But what would happen if she unequipped it? Would that knowledge disappear instantly, leaving her as clueless as before? Or... would the skill leave something behind—some kind of permanent foundation she could continue to build upon?

If skills were purely temporary and tied only to equipment, vanishing the moment the tool was removed, then that honestly made little sense to me.

After all, if someone performs the same task a hundred times, or even a thousand times, do they really gain nothing from the experience?

Surely some of that knowledge had to remain.

On the other hand, if the knowledge became fully permanent after just one use, then the mechanic would be ridiculously broken.

I could simply stockpile equipment loaded with every possible skill, then cycle my citizens through them one by one.

Equip.

Unequip.

Repeat.

In no time, every goblin in my little kingdom would become a jack-of-all-trades, proficient in everything from butchering and cooking to blacksmithing and construction.

I highly doubted the System would allow something that overpowered.

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As I continued watching the two of them work on the wolf, the truth gradually revealed itself.

"Aha... I see!"

It was actually a mixture of the two earlier theories.

A hybrid effect.

The skill was neither completely temporary nor permanently imprinted from the very beginning.

At first, the difference between Gopuro and Gopuran was obvious. Gopuran, equipped with the [Butchering] skill, worked quickly and cleanly, while Gopuro struggled with even some of the more basic cuts.

Then, after working for a while, Gopuran paused to rest and clean her hands. She handed the knife to Gopuro for a moment.

The change was immediate.

His movements became sharper and more confident. He handled the knife more naturally, made fewer mistakes, and worked noticeably faster.

But when Gopuran took the knife back, Gopuro's performance quickly returned to its previous level.

The conclusion was clear.

The skill and knowledge granted by the weapon were not permanent. They faded once the equipment was unequipped.

However, they weren't completely lost, either.

Even without the skill-granting knife, Gopuro was noticeably better than when he'd started. His movements were still clumsy, but he had clearly picked up something from the short time he'd spent using the weapon.

In other words, the equipment seemed to accelerate genuine learning.

It was almost like a powerful catalyst, providing temporary guidance while allowing the user to gradually develop the underlying skill through actual practice.

"Oh my..."

"This opens up so many possibilities!"

"Though, I'll need to perform more experiments with different types of equipment to confirm this."

If this worked with other skills as well, the implications were huge.

I could potentially use skill-granting equipment as a training tool, allowing my citizens to learn skills much faster than they normally could.

And finally, after nearly four hours of hard work, something extraordinary happened.

Gopuro suddenly froze in the middle of a cut.

A faint glow surrounded his body.

His eyes widened, as if he had just received some kind of notification that only he could perceive.

Then...

He picked up the knife again.

This time, even without the skill-granting weapon, his movements were completely different.

He worked smoothly and confidently, cutting through the carcass almost as efficiently as Gopuran had while using the [Butchering] skill.

"No way..."

Suspicious, I immediately pulled up his status screen.

And there it was.

[Butchering Lv. 1]

"Aha! I knew it!"

My hypothesis had just gained some serious evidence!

It wasn’t fully confirmed yet, of course. One successful example wasn’t enough to establish the exact mechanics.

But it was certainly strong evidence that repeatedly using skill-granting equipment could eventually allow the user to permanently learn the skill.

"Interesting..."

I suddenly had a whole new avenue of experimentation to explore.

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In the end, it took the two of them a full four hours to completely process the wolf carcass.

They worked deep into the night, yet neither complained or showed any sign of wanting to stop. By the time they finally finished, the entire carcass had been broken down into a gigantic pile of useful materials.

The meat was neatly cut into thick, uniform pieces, while the bones had been thoroughly cleaned and stripped of any remaining flesh. The pelt was magnificent, its thick gray fur still soft and glossy, all the blood and dirt having been carefully removed. Even the fangs, claws, horns, and other useful parts had been separated and sorted neatly into their own piles.

I transferred everything into my Inventory and let the System calculate the yield, curious to see just how much we’d managed to obtain.

The result was staggering:

316 Wolf Meat (1 kg per unit)

125 Bones (1 kg per unit)

50 Fat (1 kg per unit)

4 Wolf Fangs

20 Wolf Claws

1 Gray Horned Wolf Pelt

2 Gray Horned Wolf Horns

1 Gray Horned Wolf Heart

10 Fur (1 kg per unit)

5 Powerstones (F)

"Damn... To think the System was only offering 250 Points for the entire unprocessed corpse! What a rip-off!!!"

At first, I'd thought 250 Points was already a generous payout for a single wolf. But after seeing the sheer quantity and quality of materials we'd extracted, it became painfully obvious.

The System was being ridiculously greedy!

Even if I sold only the Meat, Bones, and Fat at the System's buyback rates...

1 Meat → 3 Points

1 Bone → 1 Point

1 Fat → 2 Points

That alone would net me 1,173 Points!

And that wasn't even counting the fangs, claws, pelt, horns, heart, or the precious Powerstones!

Those rare materials were worth even more.

Wolf Fang → 10 Points each

Wolf Claw → 5 Points each

Gray Horned Wolf Pelt → 130 Points

Gray Horned Wolf Horn → 45 Points each

Gray Horned Wolf Heart → 100 Points

Fur → 10 Points each

Adding everything together, the materials I'd obtained from a single wolf were worth a staggering 1,733 Points.

And that was before even counting the five Powerstones, which were worth another 25 Points in total.

That brought the total theoretical value to 1,758 Points.

Of course, the System would take a 10% transaction fee if I sold everything.

But even so... I'd still receive a whopping 1,582.2 Points!

"Damn..."

I couldn't help marveling at the ridiculous amount of wealth I'd just extracted from a single wolf.

The System had only offered me 250 Points for the entire corpse, yet processing it myself had increased its value to nearly seven times that amount.

"Guys! This is incredible! Thank you for the hard work!"

It felt so happy to be rich.

I looked at the mountain of materials filling my Inventory, already imagining all the things I could buy with this newfound wealth.

Naturally, I decided my two goblins deserved a proper bonus.

"Obviously, three Powerstones for this task is way too cheap! Alright, each of you gets five extra!"

The moment they received the additional rewards, the two goblins lit up with pure joy, jumping around and chattering excitedly.

As usual, they immediately popped the Powerstones into their mouths.

Their bodies began to glow, the light noticeably brighter than before.

Then, a familiar notification rang out.

[Ding! Gopuro has leveled up! Level 10 → Level 11]

[Ding! Gopuran has leveled up! Level 10 → Level 11]

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"So I was right! They’re eating Powerstones to level up!"

I didn’t waste another second before pulling up their status screens, while the two danced and celebrated.

[Citizen Status]

Name: Gopuro

Race: Super Forest Goblin

Rank: ★★

Level: 11 (↑ +1)

Vital Status

- HP: 300 / 300 (Max ↑ +50)

- MP: 30 / 30 (Max ↑ +5)

- Stamina: 67 / 300 (Max ↑ +50)

Core Attributes

- Attack: 23 (↑ +8)

- Defense: 12 (↑ +2)

- Magic Attack: 0

- Magic Defense: 0

- Magic Capacity: 0

- Speed: 5

* The arrows indicated changes compared to last time I checked their statuses.

I checked Gopuran’s status as well, confirming that she had received a similar increase in her stats.

So, per level, they gain roughly +50 Max HP, +5 Max MP, +50 Max Stamina... and a whopping 10 points distributed across their core attributes? That’s fantastic growth!

That immediately made me compare their current stats with what I remembered from when I had first saved Gopuro.

Back then, he was only Level 8 and had around 10 total attribute points. If that growth pattern had remained consistent, each level from 0 to 10 would have granted him only about 1 point, or at most 2, to distribute among his core attributes.

But now, the jump from Level 10 to Level 11 alone had given him nearly as many attribute points as his entire progression from Level 0 to 10 combined!

The difference was completely absurd! No wonder the cost of leveling up had become so steep.

In this case, it had taken seven Powerstones to push Gopuro from Level 10 to Level 11.

At five Castle Points per Powerstone, that was equivalent to 35 Castle Points.

By comparison, raising him directly from Level 9 to Level 10 through [Lord's Blessing] had cost me only 12 Points.

That means I should always use Powerstones to level up my citizens whenever possible. It's far more cost-efficient. [Lord Blessing] should only be used in emergencies.

After all, I'd already checked the cost of using [Lord's Blessing] to push Gopuro from Level 10 to 11. And the system was quoting me a whopping 100 Points! That's nearly three times as expensive as using Powerstones!

And if I wanted to push him from Level 11 to 12 after that, the cost would jump again to 150 Points.

Hmmm... There really is a cost to everything.

This Super Forest Goblin variant is powerful, but raising one requires far more resources.

Satisfied with the results of my little analysis, I decided to let the two goblins rest.

I turned off the torchlight, leaving only the crackling firepit to illuminate the room and provide a little warmth.

The two goblins settled down for the night, exhausted from their long day of work.

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The next morning, I let the two goblins sleep in a little longer.

Today would be a relatively relaxing day for them. I planned to spend most of the morning testing my [Quest Creation] skill and figuring out exactly how flexible it was.

I started with a few small experiments that didn't require their participation, mostly probing the hidden rules behind the skill.

Before long, the mechanics began to fall into place.

The first revelation was that I had previously assumed quest rewards were limited to items I already had in my Inventory.

That turned out to be only partially true.

The actual restriction wasn't strictly "things I currently possess," but rather "things I can afford."

When I tried creating a simple quest that rewarded 1 kg of chicken meat, even though I had zero chicken in my Inventory at the time, the System still allowed me to generate the quest scroll.

But then it slapped a small note to beneath the reward section:

[If, at the moment of completion, no chicken meat is present in the Inventory, the required cost will be automatically deducted from your Castle Points balance.]

Interesting.

That meant I didn't actually need to stockpile every possible quest reward beforehand. As long as I had enough Castle Points to cover the cost when the quest was completed, the System could simply purchase or generate the reward on my behalf.

Even more surprising, I could offer rewards that didn't physically exist at all, such as "Level +1" or "+1 [Regeneration] Skill Level."

This worked because I possessed the [Lord's Blessing] skill, which allowed me to directly increase my citizens' levels and skill levels.

When I included such rewards in a quest, the System explained that it would calculate the equivalent cost and deduct the required amount from my Castle Points at the moment the quest was completed.

In other words, the cost would be exactly the same as if I had manually used [Lord's Blessing] myself.

However, I couldn't offer direct increases to Core Attributes such as Attack, Defense, Speed, and so on.

That was because the scope of [Lord's Blessing] was currently limited to increasing overall levels and skill levels. It could not increase stats. And there was also no other way for me to do so.

Still, this also meant that if I ever acquired a skill capable of directly increasing Core Attributes, I should theoretically be able to create quests with those kinds of rewards as well.

Pretty nice.

On the flip side, there was naturally a limit to how extravagant I could make the rewards.

When I tried offering something completely beyond my means, such as "Level +20," the System simply refused to generate the quest scroll.

The reason was straightforward.

With my current Castle Points balance, I couldn't possibly afford the cost.

Yeah, that makes sense.

The System wasn't going to let me promise rewards that I couldn't actually pay for.

Finally, I tested whether I could use items that my citizens gathered during a quest as part of the reward itself.

I drafted a simple quest:

Quest Objective: Gather 10 Twigs.

Reward: 5 Twigs.

At that moment, I had no twigs in my Inventory, and the System Shop didn't offer them for sale either.

The only realistic source of twigs was...

The goblins themselves.

They would have to gather them while completing the quest.

To my surprise, the System accepted the quest without complaint.

Cool!

This opens up so much flexibility!

I could already imagine all sorts of possibilities.

As long as the quest itself could provide the resources needed to fulfill its own reward, I wouldn't necessarily have to stockpile everything beforehand.

That could make resource-gathering quests far more efficient.

Just then, Gopuro and Gopuran woke up at almost exactly the same moment, as though they shared some kind of internal alarm clock.

For a brief moment, they both looked drowsy, blinking sleepily as they sat up.

But within two heartbeats, they were already wide awake and moving.

Gopuro immediately dropped to the floor and started doing a quick set of push-ups, while Gopuran stretched her arms and legs, loosening up her body after a night's sleep.

"Perfect timing, you two!"

With my test subjects awake and ready, it was time for the next round of experiments!

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But of course, I wasn't heartless enough to send my citizens to work on an empty stomach!

So I promptly provided them with a free steak breakfast. Just the raw ingredients, though. They handled the cooking themselves.

Now that I finally had a healthy stockpile of Castle Points, spending one or two Points on food barely felt like an expense. Of course, those costs could add up quickly once I had more citizens. For now, though, I was happy to let the two of them enjoy their privileged treatment.

Half an hour later, it was time to begin my experiments.

First, I spent a few Points to purchase five units of Stone.

Apparently, I could materialize them as five separate 10 kg blocks... or combine them into a single massive 50 kg slab.

Naturally, I chose the latter.

The enormous block materialized in the courtyard with a heavy thud. The impact immediately caught the goblins' attention, and both of them rushed outside to investigate the sudden noise.

The moment they stepped into the courtyard, I slapped a quest scroll onto the surface of the stone.

It wasn't a repeatable quest, so only one of them could take it.

[Quest: Strength Demonstration #1!]

Quest Info: Your ruler wishes to evaluate your strength. Mighty follower, lift this block of stone overhead to prove your worth!

Quest Type: One-Time

Objective: Lift the 50 kg stone over your head and hold it steady for 2 seconds.

Reward: 1 Chicken Drumstick

Gopuro was faster.

He snatched the quest scroll and accepted it before Gopuran even had a chance to react.

[Ding! Gopuro has accepted your "Strength Demonstration #1" quest!]

The goblin girl let out an indignant yell and puffed out her cheeks, clearly frustrated that she'd been beaten to it.

But Gopuro wasn't fazed in the slightest. He simply laughed triumphantly, looking like a warrior who had just claimed victory in single combat!

Gopuran, meanwhile, was visibly seething with jealousy. She could only cross her arms, stomp one foot, and shoot him a glare that could have curdled milk.

"Haha, this guy is definitely no gentleman!"

I chuckled inwardly at their antics.

"Don’t worry, Gopuran. There’ll be more quests after this! You’ll get your turn soon enough!"

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Chapter 35: Strength Demonstration Quest

Gopuro then motioned for his sister to move aside, clearing some space for his performance.

After evolving into Super Forest Goblin, the guy had grown seriously buff, with muscles thick and well defined. Considering his current strength, I had no doubt that lifting 50 kilograms would be little more than child’s play for him.

He crouched down and gripped the block with both hands, planting his feet firmly against the ground. His expression became surprisingly focused.

Then he heaved.

"Rarr!"

With a powerful burst of strength, he hoisted the 50 kg stone overhead and held it steady!

His arms barely trembled under the weight.

[Ding! Gopuro has completed your "Strength Demonstration #1" quest!]

The instant the quest was completed, Gopuro hurled the slab aside and let out a triumphant roar.

The stone landed with a heavy thud, kicking up a small cloud of dust.

At the same time, the promised chicken drumstick materialized in his hand.

He immediately devoured it right in front of Gopuran, even flashing her a smug little grin as he chewed.

"Oh, haha! This bastard!"

I couldn’t help chuckling inwardly.

Gopuran continued pouting, her hands planted firmly on her hips. Her green face seemed to take on a deeper, embarrassed reddish hue as she glared at her brother.

I was definitely seeing some serious sibling dynamic right there.

"Now then... time for round two."

"Gopuran, you’ve got to be faster this time! You have more Speed than Gopuro, right? I believe in you!"

I absorbed the stone back into my Inventory, then materialized a new one.

This time, I doubled the weight.

100 kg!

BAM!

The massive slab crashed onto the courtyard floor, kicking up a cloud of dust.

I immediately slapped another quest scroll onto its surface.

The objective was identical: lift the stone overhead and hold it there for two seconds. The only differences were the stone’s weight and the reward: **2 Chicken Drumsticks.**

I was counting on Gopuran to snatch the quest this time.

But nope.

Gopuro beat her again.

By a fraction of a second.

Like... **0.00001 seconds!**

[Ding! Gopuro has accepted your "Strength Demonstration #2" quest!]

"YAHAHAHAA!"

His laughter was even louder and smugger than before!

Gopuran’s frustration finally boiled over. She stomped her foot hard enough to send a tiny puff of dirt into the air, glaring at her brother as though she were ready to challenge him to a duel.

It was honestly kind of adorable seeing this girl get this mad.

"Well... it is what it is."

"Go on, Gopuro! Show me what you've got!"

Gopuro cracked his knuckles with a wide grin, then tilted his head from side to side, loosening his neck. He bent down and rolled his shoulders a few times, apparently taking the challenge much more seriously this time.

I watched eagerly.

Fifty kilograms had been child's play.

But what about 100 kg?

That remained to be seen.

Gopuro gripped the slab tightly with both hands and planted his feet. Then, with a deep, guttural grunt, he poured every ounce of strength into the lift.

"URRRRGGHHHH!"

This time, it was clearly much tougher.

His arms trembled under the strain, and the muscles across his body tightened as he fought to raise the massive slab. His feet dug into the dirt as he slowly forced the stone higher.

But the stubborn goblin refused to give up.

Slowly, he pushed it higher...

Higher...

Until he finally managed to hoist the entire 100 kg slab overhead!

For a moment, he wobbled beneath the weight.

Then he steadied himself.

He held it there for the required two seconds.

Then, the instant the System notification appeared, he let it crash back onto the ground.

[Ding! Gopuro has completed your "Strength Demonstration #2" quest!]

The System immediately delivered the two promised drumsticks.

And that silly Gopuro boy promptly inhaled both of them right in front of Gopuran’s increasingly teary eyes, just like before.

"Haha! Excellent!"

I mentally showered the guy with praise he couldn’t even hear.

I already knew that their evolution and stat increases had made them much stronger. But numbers on a screen were still just numbers.

Watching them perform actual physical feats gave me a much better sense of what their bodies were truly capable of.

So, at their current stats, 100 kg is still basically ’easy as cake,’ huh?

With Gopuro claiming yet another victory, I reset the field and spawned the third slab.

BAM!

The instant the massive stone crashed down, both goblins lunged toward the quest scroll without so much as glancing at each other.

Gopuro still beat his younger sister to it.

[Ding! Gopuro has accepted your "Strength Demonstration #3" quest!]

"YAHAHAHAHAHA!"

His cackle rang through the courtyard once more, like the laugh of an absolute cartoon villain.

But the moment he actually read the quest details, his smug grin completely evaporated.

"Muehehehehe..."

I laughed evilly inside.

"What are you gonna do now, my guy?"

Because this time, it wasn’t 100 kg.

It wasn’t even 200 kg.

It was...

500 Kilo-freaking-grams!

With that, my original question had been decisively answered.

Even if a citizen lacked the ability to complete a quest, they could still accept it.

Hell, they could even grab the quest scroll without reading it and have absolutely no idea what they'd just signed up for!

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Now, would he actually be forced to complete the task now that he'd accidentally accepted the quest?

Gopuro planted his feet wide, gripped the massive 500 kg slab with both hands, and strained with everything he had.

The muscles across his thick green arms tightened as veins stood out along his forearms and neck. His face twisted with raw effort as he drew in a deep breath and unleashed a thunderous roar.

"RAARRRRR! HNNGGGGHHHHH!!!"

"Ohhhh! Come on Gopuro!"

"You can do it!!!"

I found myself secretly cheering him on.

"Oh god... Don't tell me 500 kg is actually possible too?!"

For a few seconds, Gopuro continued pushing with everything he had.

But in the end...

Nope.

There was no miracle for Gopuro.

His grip faltered, and the massive slab didn't even budge an inch off the ground before his hands slipped completely.

Gopuro lost his balance and tumbled backward, landing hard on his rear with a heavy *thud*.

[Ding! Gopuro has abandoned your "Strength Demonstration #3" quest!]

"Well, I figured!"

"Nice try, though!"

Apparently, citizens could abandon a quest once they realized they were incapable of completing it.

That was good to know.

But why had he still tried, even though he knew he had no chance?

Hehe. The answer lay in something I'd secretly added to the quest.

[Punishment: Failure to complete the quest will result in uncontrollable laughter for five minutes!]

"Muahahahaha!"

The moment the quest was abandoned, the punishment activated.

Gopuro's face immediately twisted in pure horror!

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[Punishment: Failure to complete the quest will result in uncontrollable laughter for five minutes!]

The moment the quest was abandoned, the punishment activated.

Gopuro's face immediately twisted in pure horror.

His eyes widened as he seemed to realize exactly what was about to happen.

Then his stomach clenched.

He doubled over, clutching his belly, and suddenly burst into uncontrollable laughter. His entire body shook as he rolled around in the dirt, kicking his legs and squirming helplessly as though some invisible magical feathers were tickling him relentlessly.

"HAHAHAHAHA!"

"AHAHAHAHAAH!

The laughter came out in loud, breathless bursts. Tears quickly streamed down his flushed cheeks as he laughed so hard that he could barely catch his breath.

The poor guy tried covering his mouth.

It didn’t help.

He tried forcing himself to stop.

That didn’t work either.

The more he struggled against it, the harder he seemed to laugh.

The sight was so absurd that even Gopuran couldn’t hold herself back.

She burst into laughter as well, pointing at her suffering brother and cackling with what could only be described as gleeful revenge.

And so, Gopuro’s face grew redder and redder as tears continued streaming from his eyes, but there was absolutely nothing he could do about it.

For a full five minutes, no matter how desperately he tried to regain control, the laughter simply kept pouring out.

"Haha, sorry, Gopuro."

I watched him suffer with barely contained amusement.

"That’s what you get for not reading the fine print. Be more careful next time, okay?"

With that little prank, I hoped the two of them had learned a valuable lesson about accepting quests too hastily.

But jokes aside, I’d also confirmed another important hypothesis.

Punishments were absolute. Once a citizen accepted a quest, the System could impose the punishment on them upon quest failure without requiring their consent.

That raised some rather unsettling possibilities.

If the System could force someone to laugh uncontrollably, then perhaps it could impose much more severe consequences as well.

Pain.

Weakness.

Temporary debuffs.

Or even something conditions like limitless diarrhea or itching. Maybe even effects that could seriously endanger someone's life.

The possibilities were honestly a little frightening.

Could it even interfere with something as complicated as a person's memories?

I had no idea.

And frankly, I wasn't eager to find out by experimenting on my own citizens.

Yes, I wanted to understand the limits of [Quest Creation], but I would never turn my citizens into guinea pigs for increasingly dangerous experiments.

I had no intention of deliberately causing them serious harm.

I wasn't that much of an evil tyrant.

Still, understanding the System's punishment mechanics could prove extremely useful in the future, especially if I ever needed to deal with hostile enemies rather than my own citizens.

For now, though, five minutes of uncontrollable laughter was more than enough.

Eventually, after what felt like an eternity, the punishment finally ended.

The laughter stopped as abruptly as it had begun.

Gopuro lay sprawled on the ground, completely exhausted. His chest heaved as he desperately sucked in air, as though he'd just run a marathon. Sweat covered his body, his face was still bright red, and his limbs looked utterly limp.

He didn't even seem to have the energy to stand up anymore.

The poor guy looked completely wrecked.

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After that, I gave Gopuro a few quiet minutes to recover from his laughter marathon.

He eventually sat up, wiping the tears from his eyes and taking several deep, shaky breaths. His face was still flushed, and his chest rose and fell rapidly as he tried to get his breathing under control.

For a few moments, he simply sat there, staring blankly ahead as though his soul had temporarily left his body.

Then he shook his head, slapped his cheeks a couple of times, and slowly got back on his feet.

He was still breathing a little heavily, but the determined look in his eyes told me he was ready to continue.

Time for the next test.

This time, it wouldn’t be a solo challenge.

Both goblins could participate.

I materialized two identical quest scrolls and let them read through the contents together.

[Quest: Strength Demonstration #4!]

Quest Info: Your ruler wishes to evaluate your strength. Mighty followers, perform push-ups to prove your worth!

Objective: Complete 100 push-ups with perfect form as quickly as possible.

Time Limit: None

Reward: 1 Chicken Drumstick if completed in under 1 minute. 2 Chicken Drumsticks if completed in under 30 seconds!

"YAAHHH!!!"

Both goblins shouted with excitement and immediately accepted the challenge!

They dropped to the ground without hesitation.

A moment later, they began pumping out push-ups.

Their movements were remarkably synchronized, arms rising and falling with smooth, controlled motions. Despite the incredible speed, neither seemed to have any trouble maintaining proper form.

One.

Two.

Three.

The numbers climbed rapidly.

Ten.

Twenty.

Thirty...

Their pace barely slowed.

Thanks to their impressive physical prowess, they tore through the quest at an absurd pace, their bodies moving with the efficiency of machines.

Gopuran finished in a blazing 24 seconds.

Gopuro, despite still being slightly fatigued from the earlier stone-lifting challenge and his five-minute laughter punishment, managed to complete his set in just 29 seconds.

Not bad at all.

In fact, that was considerably faster than I'd expected.

Both had earned the full reward of two Chicken Drumsticks each.

The System immediately delivered their rewards, and the two goblins wasted no time devouring them.

However, this was only the warm-up.

The real fun was about to begin.

I let them quickly finish their drumsticks, giving them a short moment to catch their breath and savor the meat. Gopuro even stretched his arms and rolled his shoulders, while Gopuran shook out her limbs in preparation for whatever ridiculous challenge I had planned next.

They had no idea what was coming.

"Now then... which one of you is ready for the ultimate challenge?"

I materialized two more quest scrolls.

[Quest: Strength Demonstration #5!]

Quest Info: Your ruler wishes to evaluate your strength. Mighty followers, perform push-ups to prove your worth!

Objective: Complete 300 push-ups with perfect form as quickly as possible.

Time Limit: 1 minute

Reward: 5 Chicken Drumsticks

Punishment: Failure will result in being forced to complete 500 push-ups immediately afterward!

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The whole point of the first push-up challenge had been to test the upper limit of their physical capabilities. Now that I knew 100 push-ups in just 24 seconds was already pushing them close to their peak, completing 300 in under one minute seemed almost impossible, especially after they had already burned through so much stamina.

Still, I was dying to know. Could the magical power of a quest override common sense and somehow turn them into push-up machines?

"Come on, it’s not that hard... right?"

As expected, both goblins froze as if they had just been asked to bench-press a mountain.

Gopuro even took one dramatic step forward, his hand halfway reaching toward the quest before he chickened out and pulled it back.

It seemed that, thanks to the previous quest, they now had a much better understanding of their own physical limitations. And they also be more aware of the punishment too.

But did that mean I would simply give up?

Of course not.

They could be refusing because the risk simply wasn’t worth the reward. So... what if I made the reward ridiculously tempting?

I updated the quest.

New Reward: 10 Powerstones (F)!

Both goblins' eyes widened instantly, flashing with raw greed.

Ten Powerstones!

That was enough for one of them to level up again!

Gopuran's foot shot forward eagerly, her fingers twitching as if she were about to snatch the scroll out of the air, only to freeze at the last second and retreat.

But Gopuro?

Oh, this glorious chad didn't even hesitate.

The muscle-brained grabbed the scroll like it owed him money, his eyes blazing with pure, unfiltered determination.

[Ding! Gopuro has accepted your "Strength Demonstration #5" quest!]

Just then, Gopuran turned to stare at him, narrowing her eyes. I caught the faint, sly curve at the corner of her lips and immediately understood what was happening.

"Aha! I see you, you clever little gremlin!"

Since her physical ability and stats were nearly identical to Gopuro's now, she had clearly decided to let him test the waters first. If he somehow managed to brute-force his way through 300 push-ups in one minute, she could do the same. If he failed... well, there was no point in her suffering the punishment.

Classic clever little strategist.

Meanwhile, Gopuro was the living definition of a muscle brain.

Either way, the show was about to begin.

Gopuro dropped to the ground, planted his palms firmly against the dirt, and exploded into push-ups with every last ounce of strength he had left!!!

His arms drove up and down like pistons gone berserk, desperately squeezing out every drop of power from his exhausted body.

One... two... three... four... five... six...

"RAAAAAAA!"

His arms swelled, muscles bulging beneath his skin as thick veins stood out like ropes. His body moved with terrifying speed, each push-up sending small clouds of dust into the air.

The poor dude was literally fighting for his life!

In just twenty seconds, he had already smashed past 100 push-ups!

Only 200 more to go!

I watched in growing horror.

"Fuck! Don’t tell me... he’s actually gonna make it?!"

"I can’t believe this. Did I seriously underestimate this guy? Just how freaking strong is he?!"

But fortunately, luck was on my side.

Near the end, exhaustion finally caught up with him. His movements became slower and increasingly labored, his arms beginning to shake beneath his weight.

He only managed to squeeze out 250 push-ups before the one-minute timer finally ran out.

Thud!

Gopuro collapsed face-first into the dirt.

Phew!!!

I let out a huge mental sigh of relief.

My precious Powerstones were safe!

My precious Castle Points were safe!

[Ding! Gopuro has failed your "Strength Demonstration #5" quest!]

"Muahahaha! Now then, Gopuro... how exactly are you going to handle the punishment?"

He had already burned through almost all of his stamina during that insane attempt. In theory, there was no way he could do another 500 push-ups...

Right?

...

Nope!

Like an enraged, system-possessed beast, his eyes suddenly glowed a menacing red. His muscles swelled again, veins throbbing wildly beneath his skin as the System forcibly enforced the punishment!!!

The goblin chad shot back to his feet and started hammering out push-ups like his life depended on it.

Which, technically, it kind of did!

Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom!

His arms pumped furiously, his chest slamming toward the ground with terrifying force and speed!

100 push-ups!

200 push-ups!

And he was still going!

I was terrified.

Gopuran was terrified too. She gasped, both hands flying to her mouth as she stared at Gopuro in disbelief.

In a panic, I yanked open his status window.

His stamina bar was plummeting at a horrifying rate.

Soon, it hit zero.

Then his HP started dropping too!

At first, it fell at a rate of 1% every two seconds.

Then it increased to 2% every two seconds.

"Fuck! This is too much!!!"

I was one second away from dumping a huge amount of Castle Point I had into [Lord’s Blessing] just to level him up.

Currently, I had near 2000 Castle Points in net worth, so I could probably afford four level-ups. That would give him a considerable boost to his stats and HP, which should at least make the push-ups easier.

But right before I panicked and spent everything, Gopuro suddenly collapsed in the middle of a push-up, nowhere near the 500 mark.

His HP was still at 80%.

[Error! The citizen no longer has the physical capability to carry out the punishment. The punishment will be nullified.]

"Urrghh..."

He groaned weakly, his overinflated muscles rapidly deflating as foam bubbled at the corner of his mouth.

Phew!!!

I let out a massive mental sigh of relief.

That scared the absolute shit out of me!

Gopuro looked completely wrecked. His entire body was drenched in sweat, and he was breathing like a broken bellows, his chest heaving with every breath.

Still, at least he was alive.

"Sorry, Gopuro... I'll compensate you handsomely later for my mistake..."

Just then, another notification popped up. Something completely unexpected.

[Ding! Gopuro has unlocked a new skill: "Enraged" by pushing far beyond his physical limits!]

[Enraged Lv. 1]

Type: Passive / Activatable

Effect: Enter an enraged state. While active, the user's Attack, Defense, and Speed stats are temporarily increased by 50%, stamina consumption is reduced by 90%, and all pain is completely nullified.

Movement-limiting negative status effects, such as stun and paralysis, as well as mind-altering effects like illusions and charm, are immediately dispelled, and the user becomes immune to them for the entire duration of the skill.

However, once the state ends, the user becomes completely unable to move for 1 hour. Afterward, the user suffers a severe penalty of -50% to all stats for 3 days.

Special Effect: Can automatically activate when Stamina or HP falls below 20%.

Cooldown: 5 days

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Holy shit...

It took me a while to calm down and process what had just happened.

Through this experiment, I had confirmed a few more things.

First, I could use the Punishment system in a rather creative way to push my citizens far beyond their usual limits by overriding their natural mental restrictions!

If used correctly, this could potentially unleash an incredible amount of power from them, allowing them to overcome situations that would otherwise be beyond their physical capabilities.

Second, I could potentially use the Quest System to enhance their training as well.

For example, people always had this kind of reaction when it came to training.

"I’m too lazy to train today..."

"I’m so tired. I want to give up already..."

That was one of the biggest problems with training. Even when someone’s body was still capable of doing more, their mind would eventually tell them to stop.

As a result, most training sessions rarely pushed someone to their true physical limits.

But if I could utilize the Punishment system properly, every training session could be pushed to the absolute maximum. There would be no need to rely entirely on sheer willpower anymore!

Of course, I would only ever do something like that if they gave me their full consent first. I wasn't going to turn my citizens into unwilling training machines.

And yeah...

Let's never do anything that stupid ever again...

Even though Gopuro had gained the powerful [Enraged] skill from the ordeal, that didn't erase the fact that my carelessness had put him in genuine danger.

I needed to create a proper safeguard, something that would prevent the Punishment system from causing excessive harm while still preserving its incredible ability to push my citizens beyond their normal limits.

Maybe I should add a clause to future Punishment description?

Something like...

"Automatically terminate the punishment if there is a risk of severe or permanent harm to the body."

Yeah.

Something like that should work.

I definitely wasn't going to make the same mistake twice.

However, before I could calm down and properly think things through, Gopuran suddenly stepped forward and boldly snatched the quest scroll.

I couldn't react fast enough.

[Ding! Gopuran has accepted your "Strength Demonstration #5" quest!]

"NO WAY!"

I panicked.

But when I looked into her bright eyes and saw the fierce determination burning within them, I immediately understood what was going through her mind.

"Yeah... you realized the true power of this Quest System too, didn't you?"

She had been watching Gopuro closely the entire time.

And now that he had gained the powerful [Enraged] skill, this clever goblin girl clearly wanted one for herself too.

Even after witnessing how completely exhausted Gopuro had been afterward, she had apparently decided that the risk was worth the reward.

And before I could stop her, she threw herself into the challenge.

Her arms began pumping furiously as she blasted through the push-ups, determined to reach the impossible target.

One after another.

Faster and faster.

Unfortunately...

It still wasn't enough.

She failed.

The moment the time limit expired, the quest punishment activated.

I could only watch helplessly as the System began enforcing it.

Haha, good luck, Puran...

May the System be with you.

****

And so...

For the next few minutes, even though I already knew exactly what was going to happen, it was still terrifying to watch.

Gopuran pushed herself with everything she had. Her big chest slammed wildly against the ground at lightning speed as the System ruthlessly forced her through the grueling punishment push-ups. The sheer repetitive force actually cracked the hard earth beneath her with each impact!

Meanwhile, I kept a nervous eye on her status screen, my Castle Points at the ready.

If her HP dropped too low, I would intervene without hesitation.

Fortunately, it never came to that.

After another intense, sweat-drenched burst of push-ups, Gopuran was able to unlock the [Enraged] skill too.

[Ding! Gopuran has unlocked a new skill: "Enraged" by pushing far beyond his physical limits!]

"Hell yeah..."

Gopuran immediately collapsed onto the ground as soon as the system spared her.

And now, both goblins lay sprawled across the dirt, drenched in sweat, their chests heaving as they desperately gulped down air.

And yet... they were grinning.

Both of them wore huge, exhausted smiles, as though they had just won the greatest and most glorious battle of their lives.

I stared at them for a moment.

"Damn... These two really are built differently..."

I decided to let them rest for a full hour before giving them two extra Powerstones each.

After all, after everything they had endured, they more than deserved the reward.

The moment the Powerstones appeared, both goblins eagerly snatched them up and immediately tossed the glowing stones into their mouths, chewing away with obvious delight.

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One hour later...

I had to admit, the [Carnivorism] skill was ridiculously overpowered!

[Carnivorism Lv.1]

Description: After consuming meat, grants a significant boost to Stamina Recovery and HP Regeneration. The duration depends on the type and amount of meat consumed.

As I fed them more thick cuts of steak, their stamina recovered at an astonishing rate. The exhaustion gradually melted away from their bodies, their breathing steadied, and the strain in their muscles disappeared.

Before long, both goblins were back to full health, looking completely refreshed and ready for more action.

Still, even though their status screens showed that they had recovered completely, I decided they had already done enough intense physical activity for one day.

There were still several experiments I wanted to run, but this time, they wouldn’t require raw strength or serious physical effort.

Instead, I had prepared something much more lighthearted.

Something fun.

"Alright, you two... surely you can handle this one, right?"

I materialized a new quest scroll on the ground in front of them.

The two goblins immediately noticed it and stared at the strange piece of paper, their eyes widening with curiosity.

Then they picked it up and began reading.

[Quest: Let’s Become Artists!]

Prerequisite: None

Quest Info: Your ruler wishes to evaluate your artistic capabilities! Dear followers, prove your worth with your best drawings!

Quest Type: One-Time

Objective: Using sticks or stones on the ground, draw your best versions of the following: the sun, the moon, a tree, a flower, and three random animals from the forest.

Time Limit: 20 minutes

Reward: 1 Chicken Drumstick

Punishment: None

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I issued the quest.

The two goblins immediately snatched up a couple of nearby sticks and began scribbling across the dirt with surprising enthusiasm.

If anything, I was quite confident in their ability to draw.

After all, the two goblins who had previously doodled all over my walls with dicks and boobies were dead proof that goblins were at least capable of putting something on a surface.

So surely these two could manage a few simple drawings, right?

One by one, their scribbled creations began taking shape on the ground.

Of course, they weren’t anywhere close to what anyone would call "real artists." Their techniques were rough and childlike at best. Still, both of them put genuine effort into their work, each displaying their own unique brand of chaotic artistry.

First up was Gopuro.

The guy’s drawings were hilariously simple, almost comically minimalist.

He drew the sun as a big, uneven circle with straight lines radiating outward like spikes. The moon was nothing more than a slightly curved banana shape.

For the tree, he sketched something that looked suspiciously like three lopsided circles stacked on top of an upside-down ice cream cone.

When it came to the animals, he clearly decided to go with the easiest options possible.

A round-bodied bird with a triangular beak and two stick legs.

A fish that was basically an elongated oval with a fan-shaped tail, no fins whatsoever, and an X for an eye.

And finally... a single, wiggly worm.

That was it.

The entire masterpiece took him barely two minutes.

Still, a pass was a pass.

A chicken drumstick promptly materialized on the ground in front of him as his reward.

Meanwhile, Gopuran approached the task with far more care and sincerity.

It didn’t look like she was simply trying to complete the quest. She poured genuine effort into every single line, drawing with a bright, childlike smile spreading across her face as though she were genuinely excited to show off her budding artistic talent to her ruler.

As a result, her sun had a cheerful smiling face, happily "holding hands" with the crescent moon beside it.

She didn’t settle for just one tree, either.

She drew an entire little grove.

Trees of different shapes and sizes filled the scene: a tall, pointy pine tree, a leafy oak with sprawling branches, and even an apple tree heavy with round fruit. She even added tufts of grass around their roots and scattered a few flowers throughout the scene for good measure.

For the animals, she placed them naturally within the landscape instead of drawing them separately.

A small, fluffy bunny sat beneath the trees, gazing up at the smiling sun with big, curious eyes.

Meanwhile, a large, menacing wolf lurked behind the trees, baring its sharp fangs in an overly dramatic pose.

And a snake coiled quietly nearby, its forked tongue sticking out between its jaws.

In the end, everything came together into one surprisingly cohesive little landscape.

She even framed the entire picture with a neat, slightly crooked border.

"Woah..."

I was genuinely impressed.

This was way better than I had expected.

I couldn’t help but reward her with an extra chicken drumstick on top of the original prize.

But the moment Gopuro saw Gopuran receive the bonus reward, he froze.

His eyes widened.

Then his expression twisted into pure shock and jealousy.

Without a moment’s hesitation, he frantically wiped away his crude masterpieces with the side of his foot and immediately started redrawing everything with far greater ambition.

His second attempt featured more trees, more animals, and even a few extra silly details.

I couldn’t help but chuckle as I watched the competitive little goblin desperately trying to catch up with his sister.

"Alright, alright..."

I materialized another chicken drumstick in front of him, and the dude’s face immediately lit up.

He snatched it up with both hands and inhaled the entire thing in a single chomp.

"These two really are siblings... haha"

"Now then... how about we try another drawing challenge?"

I prepared another fresh quest scroll and materialized it in front of them.

This time, I had something much more ambitious in mind.

"Can you two draw a car?"

****

The new quest included several modern objects: a car, a human, a gun, a book, a dress, and a burger.

The quest scroll materialized smoothly, but neither goblin reached for it right away.

They leaned in close to read the objectives, then turned to each other with deeply puzzled expressions. They began muttering rapidly in their goblin tongue, scratching their heads and gesturing wildly at the list as if trying to figure out what on earth I was talking about.

I see...

So they can’t accept the quest because they literally don’t understand what most of these objects are.

It seemed obvious in hindsight, but I still needed to confirm it.

After all, the System was powerful enough to bridge communication between completely different races. For a moment, I had wondered whether issuing a quest might automatically implant the necessary knowledge into their minds.

Apparently, it didn't work that way.

With that important detail settled, I quickly adjusted the quest.

This time, I asked them to draw only the objects from the list that they actually recognized.

In the end, they were only able to complete two: a human and a dress.

The rest, the gun, the book, and especially the burger, were met with nothing but blank stares and confused shrugs. Neither of them showed any sign of ever having encountered such things before.

But what caught my attention the most was how they depicted the human.

Both goblins drew nearly identical stick figures with wide, wicked grins full of sharp teeth, weapons clutched in their hands.

Some held swords and shields, others carried spears.

A few even seemed to be casting fireballs directly from their palms.

I see...

So this world really does have humans.

After all, if humans didn't exist in this world, there was no way these goblins could have drawn such a specific image of them.

With nothing more than a simple drawing quest, I had just confirmed the existence of humans in this world.

But that wasn't the only thing I had learned.

I had also gained a glimpse into the relationship between humans and goblins.

And my suspicion was right.

It didn't seem to be a particularly friendly one.

The way the goblins portrayed humans... They certainly didn't see them as kind or harmless people.

Instead, in their eyes, humans seemed to be something closer to terrifying and dangerous monsters.

No wonder they reacted so violently to my human emperor statue...

Now I finally understood why they had hated that statue so much.

But this discovery also raised another potential long-term problem.

If I continued taking in goblins, or eventually welcomed other monster races into my territory, then sooner or later, I might find myself standing on the opposite side of humanity.

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Well, that's a problem for the distant future!

It wasn't like I would be meeting any humans anytime soon. From the look of my surroundings, I was deep within goblin territory, far away from any human settlements.

Yeah... let's not worry about that for now.

I handed out their well-earned rewards, then prepared two more quests.

At first, I wasn't entirely sure whether they could handle them. But after seeing the amount of creativity they had put into their previous drawings, I felt a little more confident.

This time, I wanted to learn more about the world around my castle. I wanted to know what was out there.

[Quest: Draw the simplest possible image of every monster or humanoid creature living in this forest that you know. Draw one image for each race.]

[Quest: Draw a simple map of this forest, using symbols to mark any notable locations you know. The map does not need to be precise.]

Time Limit: 2 hours

*****

And just like that, the goblins got to work.

They continued drawing with surprising enthusiasm, filling the ground with simple sketches as they tried to put everything they knew onto paper, or rather, dirt.

Slowly, through their drawings, the fog surrounding the world beyond my castle began to lift, and I finally managed to piece together a rough picture of my surroundings.

First and foremost, I was deep inside a truly massive forest.

My castle stood slightly southeast of its center, while most of the surrounding woodland was controlled by goblins. They lived in independent communities and tribes, with a total of twenty-four tribes represented on the map, each occupying its own territory.

There was even a massive tribe located a little farther to the north.

Perhaps that's the strongest tribe out there.

But goblins were far from the only creatures living in these woods.

There were the horned gray wolves, whose den lay not far from here. Other monsters included large boars, bears, slimes, and countless other fantasy beasts lurking throughout the forest.

As for notable locations, the two goblins were able to mark several caves, small lakes, a swamp, a river, and even a massive waterfall.

But then there was one detail that really caught my attention...

Apparently, there was a mysterious region marked with skull-and-bone symbols on the map. It covered a surprisingly large area, almost as if someone had deliberately left a huge hole in the middle of the map.

There must be something dangerous in there.

I couldn't help but wonder what could possibly be lurking in that mysterious region.

And... that was about it.

This was the extent of the knowledge these two goblins possessed.

Of course, I knew better than to take every detail at face value.

The scale of the world they had drawn seemed far too vast for these two goblins to have explored on their own. If I had to guess, most of this information had probably been passed down through their tribe by stronger and more experienced goblins.

Which meant there were almost certainly gaps in the picture.

Some details might be missing entirely. Others could be inaccurate, exaggerated, or based on rumors.

That was an important limitation I would need to keep firmly in mind going forward.

Still, even an imperfect map was far better than having no information at all.

And with that, today's experiments with the [Quest Creation] skill were finally complete.

Things had gone far better than I had expected, and I felt deeply satisfied with the results.

For the first time since becoming a castle, I finally had a rough idea of what lay beyond my walls.

******

Anyways, after the map was finally completed... I just stared at it for a moment and sighed.

Man... I really wish the System would give me some kind of screenshot or photography skill!

I wanted to preserve this map properly, either as an image, a painting, or something similar. Unfortunately, I had no way to do that. Sooner or later, all the drawings on the dirt ground would be gone.

The best I could do was use my [Quest Creation] skill to make notes.

Yup.

Apparently, I had stumbled upon another rather creative use for the Quest System.

Since I could write practically anything into a quest's description, the quest scrolls could also function as an information storage system!

It wasn't exactly convenient, but it worked.

I carefully entered the most important details from the map into a quest note, then stored the scroll inside my Inventory.

There. At least I wouldn't have to rely entirely on my memory anymore.

Now then... time for some more questions.

I prepared another quest.

[Quest: The creator wishes to know about your origin. Point to the tribe where you are from.]

I gave the quest to both of them.

The moment they read it, the two goblins exchanged a brief glance before simultaneously pointing toward a particular tribe located not too far from my castle.

According to their map, the area around the tribe looked fairly pleasant. There was a small lake nearby, along with a cave that could presumably serve as shelter.

Interesting.

And that immediately gave me another idea.

I quickly prepared another quest.

[Quest: Goblin Citizen Recruitment!]

Prerequisite: None

Quest Info: Your ruler wishes to take in more citizens! Return to your tribe and tell your fellow goblins about this place!

Quest Type: One-Time

Objective: Convince as many members of your tribe as possible to come and become citizens of the great Castle Lord!

Time Limit: 2 days

Reward: 1 Powerstone per 10 successful recruits.

Punishment: None

Yup.

I needed to increase my number of citizens as quickly as possible!

More citizens meant more Castle Points, which meant faster access to higher-level shops, abilities, and all sorts of other useful upgrades.

And since their tribe wasn't particularly far away, this should have been a relatively simple task. There was really no reason not to try.

If they moved quickly, they could probably even complete the quest by this afternoon!

All they had to do was tell their fellow goblins about their incredible new ruler.

They could boast about an almighty Castle Lord who could provide an endless supply of delicious food, a steady stream of Powerstones, and perhaps even the opportunity to evolve into stronger forms.

Honestly, from my perspective, it sounded like an incredibly easy sell. Who wouldn't want to join a place like that?

But to my surprise, neither of the two goblins accepted the quest.

Instead, they remained completely still, staring down at the quest scroll in silence.

Several long seconds passed before they finally exchanged a slow glance, and the expressions on their faces had changed completely.

There was no excitement or anticipation at the thought of returning to their tribe, nor was there even the slightest hint of greed at the prospect of recruiting more citizens and earning additional rewards. Instead, their eyes were filled with something far more complicated.

Worry. Hesitation. Fear. And perhaps even a faint trace of anger and pain.

The atmosphere around them suddenly felt much heavier than before.

Oi....

...What's going on?

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