

BloodLine 931

Chapter 931: Getting Attention

From the MC's Perspective:

The familiar hum of energy coursed through the air as I approached the Teleportation Platform.

I could feel a slight tingle on my skin as the platform's activation sequence began.

With a soft hum, the world around me distorted, the surroundings blurring before snapping back into focus, and I found myself standing in the Headquarters courtyard, the cool breeze of home brushing against my skin.

Taking a moment to steady myself, I began the walk toward the Headquarters building.

The mission had been fraught with peril-monsters lurking in the shadows, and worse yet, the warriors whose greed and hunger for power made them just as deadly.

The hunting teams prowling Alpha City were a constant threat, their movements unpredictable, their alliances fickle.

Going back there without inside information would be suicide.

I clenched my fists, reminding myself that it wasn't just the monsters out there that could end me-it was those gangs.

As I crossed the threshold into the Headquarters, the warmth of the building welcomed me.

It felt safe, familiar.

My boots echoed faintly in the vast hall as I made my way to the mission desk, my hand tightening around the pouch that contained the monster core.

The clerk barely looked up as I handed it over, scanning it in and updating my mission reports.

The quiet acknowledgment of my completion felt anti-climactic compared to the chaos I had just survived.

With the paperwork done, I turned on my heels and made my way toward the elevator at the far end of the hall.

Each step felt heavier, the adrenaline that had kept me on edge during the mission now fading into exhaustion.

“Creak!”

The sound of the elevator doors sliding open broke the stillness.

I stepped inside, the cold metallic walls reflecting my tired expression back at me.

With a single press, the button for my floor lit up.

The gentle hum of the elevator’s ascent was calming, almost lulling me into a sense of ease.

Within minutes, the doors opened, and I stepped out onto my floor, the familiar hallway stretching before me.

As soon as I reached my door and stepped inside my room, the tension in my shoulders finally eased.

“Phew...”

The air here was different, familiar, like a sanctuary away from the chaos of Alpha City.

I let out a long, tired breath, the weight of the mission slipping off my shoulders.

The silence of the room felt comforting, the only noise coming from my steady breathing.

I hadn't realized how tense I had been until this very moment.

Without wasting time, I removed my uniform, dropping it in a heap by the door.

My muscles ached, and every step felt like a reminder of the dangers I had faced.

The idea of a hot bath was too inviting to resist.

My room had always been my escape, but right now, the bath would be the ultimate release.

It was time to wash away the grime, the blood, and the stress of survival.

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Alpha City:

The air in Alpha City was thick with tension as the sun began to set, casting long shadows over the crowded streets.

In the heart of the city, hidden behind fortified walls and iron gates, the hunting teams were trickling back to their respective gangs, reporting on the day's missions.

Each gang kept meticulous records of the teams that ventured out daily, tracking their comings and goings.

In Alpha City, where survival was as much about information as it was about strength, knowing who was where-and why-was a matter of power.

At this moment, deep within the place of the Vulture Gang, a grim-faced leader scanned the reports laid out before him.

The room was dim, the only light coming from the flickering data screens that displayed mission logs.

The leader's eyes narrowed as he noticed several of their hunting teams had yet to report back.

A slow tension built in the room, the unspoken question lingering: Were these teams delayed, or had they fallen?

Out in the wilds, anything was possible.

While the Vulture Gang awaited their missing teams, a new piece of information crackled through the city's underground networks, spreading like wildfire.

The rumors had begun to swirl-Lowell McClain's student had been spotted in Alpha City.

It was a name that carried weight, and for good reason.

Lowell McClain was a Core Member of the Federation, a powerful figure not just in Delta City, where he held control, but throughout the territories.

His influence stretched far, and the idea that his student was in Alpha City piqued the curiosity-and suspicion-of many.

Alpha City's gangs prided themselves on their intricate web of informants, spies, and double agents.

Their information networks were vast, like invisible tendrils that reached into every corner of the city.

It didn't take long for word of the lone warrior's appearance to spread, and soon every major gang knew that Lowell McClain's protégé had entered their turf.

Reactions varied.

Some dismissed it as a minor event, just another strong figure passing through their dangerous city.

But others sensed something more.

For those familiar with the inner workings of the Federation, this wasn't just a visit-it was a statement.

Lowell McClain's name alone brought with it the weight of political friction that had long simmered among the Core Members of the Federation.

Factions within the organization often clashed, and the sudden presence of his student in Alpha City sparked speculation.

Was this a routine mission, or was something deeper at play?

For the more hostile factions, this news was like a spark to kindling.

The friction between the Core Members had been an open secret for years, and now, with McClain's student in their midst, they saw opportunity.

A new drama was brewing, and the hostile factions were more than eager to stoke the flames.

As the city buzzed with the news, plans were already being made in the shadows.

The gangs of Alpha City were not to be underestimated, and for some, the presence of Lowell McClain's student was an opportunity to strike at the Federation itself, to weaken one of its Core Members through their protégé.

In the sprawling, cutthroat streets of Alpha City, nothing was ever just coincidence.

A few hours later, the atmosphere within the Vulture Gang's headquarters had grown more tense.

One by one, the remaining hunting teams had returned, except for one.

The usual sounds of warriors returning-boots clattering, armor clinking-faded into an uncomfortable silence as the leaders began to realize something was amiss.

The warriors in the Vulture Gang exchanged uneasy glances.

A missing team was not uncommon, but when they began to review the team's composition, their concern deepened.

The absent team wasn't just any group-they were made up of three SSS-ELITE Rank Warriors, some of the most capable fighters in the gang.

These weren't rookies who would be easily overwhelmed or distracted.

They had been sent out to complete a mission related to monster captures, something they'd done countless times before with precision and speed.

As the leaders pulled up the mission logs and reviewed the details, it became clear what their objective had been: to capture Armadillo Monsters.

A common enough task.

Armadillos, while formidable, were not considered a high-level threat to a team of their caliber.

With their thick, armor-like hides and powerful defensive abilities, these creatures were known to be tricky but not impossible to subdue, especially for warriors of this rank.

The mission was supposed to be routine, simple even, for a team like theirs.

That's what made their delay so troubling.

The room buzzed with speculation.

Warriors and strategists gathered in small groups, discussing what could have gone wrong.

"It doesn't make sense," one of the more experienced fighters muttered.

"They should've been back by now.

A mission like that shouldn't take more than a few hours, tops."

Some began to wonder if there was more to this situation than met the eye.

Could they have encountered an unexpected threat?

Perhaps a rival gang had intervened, or worse-was it possible they'd stumbled upon something much more dangerous than Armadillo Monsters?

Despite their growing concerns, the Vulture Gang decided to remain patient.

The leaders exchanged cautious glances, agreeing that it was still possible the team had run into complications-perhaps they had sustained injuries during the capture and needed time to recover before returning.

Monster hunts could be unpredictable, and delays weren't unheard of.

"We'll give them a day," the gang leader finally announced, his voice carrying a tone of authority, though it was laced with uncertainty.

"If they're injured, they could be recovering.

It's not uncommon for teams to take longer to return after a tough fight."

The warriors in the room nodded in agreement, though an air of unease still lingered.

They had all seen their fair share of battles and knew that sometimes, delays were a precursor to disaster.

For now, all they could do was wait and hope that the missing team would report back soon, intact.

But as the hours dragged on and the tension mounted, an unsettling feeling began to settle over the Vulture Gang-one that whispered of deeper dangers lurking just beneath the surface.

Chapter 932: Part 1: Truth comes out

From MC's Perspective:

The following day,

After waking up and shaking off the remnants of sleep, I fell into my familiar routine.

A quick stretch, a wash, and a light meal to start the day-it was all part of a disciplined ritual I had long established.

But none of that mattered compared to what came next.

With anticipation building inside me, I made my way to the essence chamber.

This was where real progress happened.

My mind was already focused on my next goal: breaking through the barrier to reach the SSS-ELITE Rank.

The moment I achieved that, everything would change.

Opportunities that were currently out of reach would suddenly be within my grasp.

The world would open up to me in ways I could only dream of.

The power, the influence-it would all be mine.

I seated myself in the center of the chamber, surrounded by the ambient flow of world energy.

It pulsed faintly in the air, a subtle but constant hum of energy waiting to be harnessed.

Closing my eyes, I began to focus, feeling the familiar sensation of mana coursing through my body.

Each breath drew in more power, each exhale released tension.

This process, though repetitive, never lost its importance.

I needed to break through.

The faster I could achieve this rank, the sooner I could dominate my path forward.

The weight of my goal pressed on my mind as I fell into deep cultivation.

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Alpha City:

As the new day dawned over Alpha City, the streets were already buzzing with activity.

The city's hunting teams, loyal to various gangs, were back at it-continuing their missions, collecting bounties, and securing their territories.

It was the same rhythm that kept the city's pulse alive, day in and day out.

But not everyone was content.

For the Vulture Gang, the day began with unease.

Their leader, a man known for his cold calculation, was growing more anxious by the hour.

His hunting team-one of the more seasoned ones-had been missing for over a day.

That wasn't normal.

Teams went out on missions and didn't return on time, sure, but they always sent word.

This silence was unsettling.

The leader had hoped they would come back on their own, but now he wasn't so sure.

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Time was slipping away, and as the morning turned to noon, a creeping sense of dread began to settle in.

Still, he wasn't ready to panic just yet.

He gave orders for the other hunting teams under his command to keep an eye out for any trace of the missing group.

If they stumbled upon any clues during their missions, they were to report back immediately.

But what he didn't want to admit to himself-or to his men-was the gnawing fear of a worst-case scenario.

The Vulture Gang was no stranger to bloody conflicts, but losing an entire team?

That was rare.

The leader kept these dark thoughts buried, hoping the day would bring better news.

By mid-afternoon, his hope was shattered.

Word reached him, not from his hunting teams, but from the families of the missing hunters.

They had their own ways of knowing when something was wrong-secret methods passed down through their bloodlines.

The message was clear, and it hit the leader harder than he had anticipated.

Their descendants were dead.

The leader's hands clenched into fists as he processed the news.

This wasn't just a setback; this was a disaster.

Losing a hunting team wasn't just a loss of manpower, it was a blow to his gang's reputation.

Whoever had killed them had made a statement, and now the Vulture Gang would have to respond.

And the leader knew one thing for certain-retribution was coming.

The leader of the Vulture Gang sat frozen for a moment, stunned to the core.

The news of his hunting team's death felt surreal, impossible even.

No one would dare commit such an act here.

After all, it was strictly forbidden by the Federation to kill fellow members.

Such actions carried severe consequences.

His shock quickly gave way to disbelief-this wasn't supposed to happen, not in this city.

But he knew better than anyone that rules could be bent, and laws had their loopholes.

His mind raced, landing on one glaring exception: the monster zones.

Inside those dangerous regions, anything was fair game.

Conflicts between rival gangs were often "settled" in those chaotic lands.

Warriors killed each other under the guise of monster hunting, using the lawlessness of the zone as cover for their brutal vendettas.

For a moment, the leader's mind churned with suspicion.

Could his hunting team have been lured into such a trap?

Could this be the work of a rival gang?

His eyes narrowed, a cold glint flashing through them as his thoughts darkened.

It wasn't impossible.

Rival gangs were always circling, like vultures waiting for weakness.

But as far as he knew, there were no real tensions simmering between the gangs lately.

No public disputes, no outright confrontations.

Sure, there were always undercurrents of competition, the subtle plays for power beneath the surface, but nothing that had escalated to this level.

Nothing that would justify the outright slaughter of one of his teams.

Confusion gnawed at him.

“Why now?” What had triggered this?

If it was an attack from a rival, there should have been some warning signs-tensions rising, whispers in the streets, something.

But there had been nothing.

The city had been relatively calm in recent days, the balance of power undisturbed.

It didn't make sense.

But one thing was clear-his team was gone, and something “had” happened to them.

His chest tightened with anger and frustration.

The leader slammed his fist onto the table in front of him, his mind made up.

He couldn't waste any more time wondering what had gone wrong.

The truth would only come to light when he had the bodies of his men.

Without hesitation, he sent out orders to his remaining hunting teams.

Whatever missions they were on, whatever tasks they were completing, they were to stop immediately.

The search for the missing team took priority now.

Every available resource had to be mobilized.

The other teams were to comb through the monster zones and the surrounding regions, leaving no stone unturned.

The leader knew his decision to halt all ongoing missions would draw attention.

The other gangs would surely notice.

It was a bold move, but the situation called for it.

He needed answers, and he needed them fast.

The bodies of his men would tell him what happened.

And once he had the truth, the next step would be clear-****whoever**** was responsible would pay dearly.

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The moment the news of their descendants' deaths spread, the families of the missing hunters wasted no time.

These families were powerful in their own right, with deep roots and connections within the Federation.

They, too, understood the gravity of the situation and weren't about to sit idly by.

Without hesitation, they called upon their own warriors-each of them Federation members, skilled and well-equipped for this type of mission.

Their orders were clear: join the search for the missing hunting team, and do not return until answers were found.

Meanwhile, the leader of the Vulture Gang was already thinking several steps ahead.

As his hunting teams scoured the monster zones, he knew brute force alone wouldn't solve this mystery.

Information was power, and in Alpha City, intelligence was often more valuable than muscle.

Someone knew something.

His instincts told him that this wasn't the work of some random occurrence.

No, this attack was deliberate, calculated.

A silent elimination like this could only be carried out by one of the city's gangs.

After all, only they had the resources and nerve to pull off such an audacious strike in secret.

Each gang in Alpha City had its own network of allies and informants, shadowy figures who lurked behind the scenes, pulling strings and orchestrating events.

His own gang was no different; they, too, had powerful backers.

But the leader hesitated to involve them just yet.

His most valuable supporter was a force to be reckoned with, someone whose wrath was unpredictable and dangerous.

Disturbing that individual too soon would be a risk.

If this person discovered the situation before the leader had concrete answers, his fury would likely be directed at the leader himself for failing to protect the gang.

“No, not yet.” He needed to uncover the truth on his own before involving his benefactor.

The last thing he wanted was to trigger a disaster by acting prematurely.

His mind raced as he considered his options.

There were subtle ways to gather information in this city, without tipping his hand.

Alpha City was a den of secrets, and with the right contacts, whispers from the shadows could reveal more than any direct confrontation.

The leader knew that several gangs in the city had been trying to expand their influence.

While there had been no open hostility recently, the undercurrents of rivalry never truly disappeared.

Some gang could have seen an opportunity, a chance to weaken the Vulture Gang by quietly eliminating one of their hunting teams.

“But who?”

Chapter 933: Part 2: Truth comes out

From MC's Perspective:

Another day had slipped by, leaving a strange tension in the air.

The hunting teams dispatched by the Vulture Gang scoured the dense forest, desperately trying to locate their comrades who had mysteriously gone missing.

Every hour stretched on, thick with unease, yet no trace of the lost team surfaced.

The forest felt unnervingly quiet, as if it held its breath, guarding secrets beneath its towering trees.

The whispers of wildlife, distant and muted, only deepened the dread hanging over the search.

Then, as the sun began its slow descent, casting long shadows between the foliage, a breakthrough emerged.

One of the hunting teams, their eyes strained from hours of fruitless searching, tracked the missing team's last known location using their encoded watches.

The GPS signal led them deep into the territory of the Armadillo Monsters, a notoriously dangerous part of the forest.

The coordinates matched perfectly with the mission briefing.

But as the team arrived, they found nothing-no blood, no bodies, no gear.

The clearing was eerily pristine, as if no battle or struggle had ever taken place.

The realization sank in.

“The Armadillos...” one of the hunters muttered, eyes scanning the canopy as though expecting the monsters to emerge from the shadows at any moment.

The team quickly pieced together what had likely occurred.

Someone made the forest their hunting ground, and their territory was unforgiving to any who ventured into it.

Given that this was the last known mission area for the missing group, it seemed all but certain-they had been killed here.

But something gnawed at them: the scene was too clean.

Not even a footprint disturbed the soil.

It was clear to the team that the killers, whoever they were, had been meticulous in erasing all evidence.

The hunters, seasoned and battle-hardened, exchanged grim looks.

They couldn't shake the suspicion that their rival Gang-were behind it.

The absence of obvious signs of a monster attack suggested something more calculated, more deliberate.

But they needed proof, something concrete to confirm their suspicions.

Determined to find a clue, the team expanded their search radius, combing through the thick underbrush and tracing every path that led out of the area.

Hours dragged by, each minute filled with the sound of crunching leaves underfoot and the occasional rustle of wildlife nearby.

As dusk approached and the forest began to dim, hope began to wane.

Dejected and empty-handed, the hunters finally regrouped.

Their faces were hardened, but frustration flickered in their eyes.

They had covered miles of terrain, investigated every potential lead, yet not a single trace of their fallen comrades or the perpetrators had been uncovered.

“Nothing,” one of the team members growled in frustration, kicking at the dirt.

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The leader of the group, eyes dark with the weight of failure, called for their return.

As the team began their trek back through the thickening twilight, a sense of defeat hung heavily over them.

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Meanwhile, the Vulture Gang Leader sat in his dimly lit office, the air thick with tension.

He was not a man who tolerated failure, but patience had become a necessary tool in his arsenal.

His sharp eyes flickered over the intelligence reports scattered on the table in front of him, each one carefully compiled, yet none offering the answers he sought.

His mind churned with frustration, though his expression remained cold and composed.

The reports painted a confusing picture.

Despite combing through every available source, there was no sign that any rival gangs were involved in a plot against the Vultures.

The Dark Serpents, the White Hounds, the Simple Fangs-none had made any suspicious moves.

It was as though the ground had swallowed the missing hunters whole, leaving no trace or explanation behind.

The lack of clarity gnawed at the leader, deepening his confusion and irritation.

Still, his thoughts churned.

If it wasn't the work of another gang, then what?

Monsters were common enough in the wilds, but his hunters were experienced.

They wouldn't have fallen so easily, not without leaving some trace of battle.

Something was deeply wrong here.

He just couldn't grasp what.

Then, a knock at the door snapped him out of his thoughts.

One of his lieutenants entered, the hunting teams following closely behind, their expressions grim and worn from the fruitless search.

“They’re back,” the lieutenant said in a low voice, bowing slightly before stepping aside to let the teams report.

The leader straightened in his seat, cold eyes narrowing as he listened to every word.

The hunters recounted their search-the last known location of the missing team, the barren clearing in the Armadillo Monsters’ territory, the eerie lack of evidence, and their suspicion that someone had erased all traces of the battle.

The silence that followed was heavy.

The leader’s fingers tapped the armrest of his chair, his mind racing.

“So you found nothing,” he said flatly, his voice betraying none of the frustration bubbling beneath the surface.

His gaze flicked over each of the returning hunters, waiting for one of them to speak up, to offer something-anything-that could shed light on the mystery.

But there was nothing more to say.

His disappointment was palpable, though he didn’t allow it to show in his face.

These were seasoned warriors, men who had never failed him before.

Yet now they stood before him empty-handed, and it stung.

With a wave of his hand, he dismissed them, sending them back out to gather more information, though he knew deep down they would likely return with the same hollow report.

As they left, the leader leaned back in his chair, staring at the ceiling.

His mind drifted to the one figure who loomed over all of this-the Backer.

The silent shadow that had given the Vulture Gang its strength, its rise to power.

The leader's heart tightened at the thought of him.

The Backer wasn't a man to be trifled with, and he had an uncanny ability to know everything that happened within his sphere of influence.

There was no doubt that he would soon learn of the missing hunters.

And when that happened...

the leader would be called to account.

The mere thought made his jaw clench.

What could he possibly say?

What excuse could he offer for his men's failure to bring back answers?

There were no lies he could spin that would satisfy the Backer's demand for results.

The leader stood up abruptly, pacing his office, his mind racing through possibilities.

He could delay the inevitable, buy time by continuing the search, but deep down, he knew it wouldn't be enough.

Sooner or later, the call would come, and when it did, he would be forced to stand before the Backer with nothing but empty words and a mystery he couldn't solve.

That thought, more than anything, made his blood run cold.

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From MC's Perspective:

I've been maintaining my daily training regimen with unwavering focus, pushing my limits with each session.

The familiar rhythm of physical exertion is a welcome distraction, but my mind can't help but drift to the outside world.

My body moves through the motions, but my thoughts are elsewhere-on the upcoming Top List Ranking Duels.

Each day, I scan the latest news feeds, anticipating some sort of update, some official confirmation.

But there's been nothing.

No announcements.

No schedule.

Not a single hint about when or if the event will even take place.

It's strange.

I thought for sure Star University, the institution behind the event, would have said something by now.

After all, this isn't just any competition-it's the duel that defines status, power, and future prospects for those of us vying for the top spots.

The silence is unnerving.

At first, I assumed they were simply finalizing the details, perhaps even building up suspense.

But as the days drag on, the absence of information has me questioning everything.

What's taking them so long?

Are there delays behind the scenes?

Or worse-could the whole event be in jeopardy?

A creeping doubt begins to settle in.

I hate the uncertainty.

Could it be that the Ranking Duels won't happen this year?

The idea frustrates me.

All the training, the preparation-it's all been leading to this.

And now?

Now there's only silence.

I've heard there's been some activity at Alpha City.

I'm not sure if they've found anything about the warriors.

I made sure to cover my tracks, so they won't be able to trace it back to me.

So I was not worried about that incident.

Even if they find out something, I'm not afraid.

I shake my head, forcing myself to push those thoughts aside.

Worrying about things beyond my control will get me nowhere.

All I can do is stay ready.

So I dive back into my training, pushing harder than before.

Each strike, each repetition, is a reminder of what I'm working toward, even if the path ahead is unclear.

The Ranking Duels may still be on the horizon, or they may not-but I refuse to let the uncertainty weaken my resolve.

I'll be prepared, no matter what comes.

Chapter 934: A joyful news!

From MC's Perspective:

A few weeks passed, and the air in the Inner Post Region was thick with excitement.

A wave of exhilarating news jolted every corner: the young, capable warriors, many of whom had spent years honing their skills, would finally have the chance to enroll in prestigious universities located in the distant Tier-4 Region.

It was a prospect beyond most of their wildest dreams, and the entire community buzzed with the energy of warriors eager to seize their opportunity.

The announcement hit like a lightning bolt.

Warriors who had long fantasized about settling into the Tier-4 region erupted into celebrations.

Cheers echoed through the training grounds, and the streets filled with the vibrant hum of hopeful anticipation.

However, amid the celebrations, the higher-ups within the Inner Post Region's various forces remained calm and largely unsurprised.

In fact, they had been bracing themselves for such a development.

The recent invasion of bizarre and terrifying monsters at their borders had shaken the region to its core.

That event had made it clear that something was amiss, something that required action beyond their own ranks.

They had sensed this shift coming.

The decision to open up university placements for their young warriors signaled an undeniable truth: the Tier-4 Region was in urgent need of fresh talent.

The upper echelons of power likely realized their defenses were thinning and new blood was needed to secure their future.

But while the opportunity thrilled the youth, the seasoned warriors-the Black Mark Warriors, Silver Mark Warriors, and the revered Gold Mark Warriors-felt a rising tension.

For them, this mass exodus of young talent posed a serious risk.

If too many of their skilled fighters left for university, the region's defenses would be left vulnerable.

The veteran warriors could already envision a future where they would face another catastrophic breach, a repeat of the monster invasion, but this time without enough hands to hold the line.

Even worse, they knew it would be years before the next generation of warriors would mature enough to fill the gap, leaving the Inner Post Region dangerously exposed.

In the minds of the commanders and experienced fighters, the upcoming enrollment wasn't just a chance at glory-it was a gamble with the region's very survival.

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Federation:

Federation Head Ben'a sat back in his chair, his face lit with a smile that had been absent for some time.

The official news of the recruitment finally came through, and the weight that had been pressing on his shoulders for months began to lift.

This was the moment he had been waiting for, though he had known about the potential recruitment for a while.

But speculation wasn't enough-he needed the official word before he could truly allow himself to breathe easy.

Now, the formal announcement had been made, and it was only a matter of time before a dignitary from the prestigious Star University arrived at their doorstep.

The very thought filled him with a mixture of excitement and nervous energy.

The Star University was known across the region for its unmatched curriculum and elite status.

A place where only the finest warriors honed their skills, transforming into legends.

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This was not just any recruitment drive; it was an opportunity that could change the course of history for the Federation.

As his thoughts wandered, they inevitably landed on Zack Lockwood.

He had been closely monitoring Zack's progress for some time now.

While Zack had yet to achieve the coveted SSS-ELITE Rank Warrior status, his potential was undeniable.

The mere fact that Star University had taken an interest in Zack's profile months ago spoke volumes.

It wasn't easy to impress the figures at Star University; their standards were impossibly high, their judgment sharp and unyielding.

Yet Zack had managed to catch their eye.

However, a small worry gnawed at the back of Ben's mind.

Though no official requests or alterations to their criteria had been made, he couldn't shake the concern that the dignitaries might reconsider their stance once they met Zack in person.

Would they deem his current status sufficient, or would they raise the bar, demanding he reach the SSS-ELITE Rank before granting him a place?

Ben'a exhaled deeply, brushing away these unwanted thoughts.

It was not his nature to dwell on uncertainties, and Zack's progress spoke for itself.

There was no point in borrowing trouble before it arrived.

With renewed focus, he straightened in his chair and activated his communicator.

It was time to speak with Zack directly.

The young warrior had a right to know about the impending arrival of the Star University dignitaries and what it could mean for his future.

Ben knew that Zack's journey had only just begun, but the road ahead was filled with promise.

The Federation Head had decided-he would not wait for fate to unfold; he would ensure Zack was fully prepared for what was to come.

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From MC's Perspective:

Boom!

The Gravity Chamber roared to life, and in an instant, the overwhelming force slammed down on me, driving me to my knees.

The pressure was intense, unlike anything I'd experienced before.

The weight wasn't just on my muscles-it felt like it was crushing me down to my very bones.

I could hear the unsettling creak of my skeleton straining under the force, each sound a reminder of the fine line I was walking between growth and injury.

But I didn't falter.

My mind stayed sharp, locked in concentration.

The pain was just another barrier to break through.

Every session in the Gravity Chamber was a test of willpower, and I was determined to push my limits further than ever before.

However, just as I was settling into the rhythm of enduring the pressure, my watch lit up with a notification, the sudden glow cutting through my focus.

It caught me off guard.

Raising an eyebrow, I debated whether to check it or not.

But curiosity got the better of me.

With a grunt, I forced myself to my feet, every movement slow and deliberate against the crushing gravity.

Each step was a battle as I made my way to the console.

Finally, with a press of a button, the Gravity Chamber powered down.

The intense weight lifted immediately, leaving me feeling almost weightless in comparison.

“Phew!” I exhaled in relief, my muscles trembling as they adjusted to the sudden change.

The strain in my bones faded, and I could finally breathe easy.

I pulled out my watch, the screen still glowing with the unread message.

When my eyes scanned the contact name, I froze, my heart skipping a beat.

It wasn't just anyone-it was the Federation Head himself.

My eyes widened in surprise, my pulse quickening.

He didn't contact people without reason.

Whatever this was about, it was important.

Without wasting any more time, I exited the chamber.

The moment I stepped into the hallway, I felt the cool, crisp air brush against my skin, a welcome contrast to the stifling atmosphere inside.

I needed to be presentable.

With the Federation Head summoning me, there was no time for half measures.

Back in my room, I quickly stripped down and jumped into the shower, the hot water cascading over me, washing away the exhaustion from the chamber.

The steam rose around me as I let the tension melt from my muscles.

Twenty minutes later, I stepped out, refreshed and more focused.

After changing into a crisp shirt and pants, I took one last glance in the mirror.

The person staring back at me looked ready-determined.

With a final breath, I left the room and made my way towards the Federation Head's office.

This meeting wasn't just a formality.

I could feel it.

Something was about to change, and whatever Head had to say, I knew it was going to alter the course of my path forever.

When I arrived at the Federation Head's office, the heavy doors slid open with a quiet hiss.

The room was vast and elegantly furnished, its dark wood accents and soft lighting giving it a sense of authority and calm.

Head Ben was seated behind his imposing desk, his expression a mix of seriousness and warmth.

The moment he saw me, a knowing smile spread across his face, a silent acknowledgment that he had been expecting me.

I felt a subtle shift in the air.

There was something deliberate about this meeting, a sense that whatever Head Ben had to say wasn't routine.

This wasn't just another briefing or casual conversation-it had weight behind it.

My mind raced with possibilities as I walked toward him, every step measured, trying to read the situation before he spoke a word.

"Zack," he greeted me with a nod, his voice steady, but with an undercurrent of importance.

"First, sit down."

I returned his nod, feeling a flicker of anticipation rise within me.

I pulled out the chair opposite him and sat down, adjusting myself slightly to get comfortable.

My eyes locked onto his, trying to gauge his mood.

His posture was relaxed, but there was a spark of energy in his gaze that told me something significant was about to be discussed.

Chapter 935: New spreads like wildfire

From MC's Perspective:

I allowed myself to relax for a brief moment, the weight of uncertainty lifting slightly from my shoulders.

But that sense of calm was short-lived as I glanced up at the Federation Head, Ben.

He smiled, though there was a seriousness in his eyes that told me he was about to deliver important news.

"The universities in the Tier-4 region have announced that they're going to formally enroll students," he said, his voice steady but carrying the gravity of the situation.

His next words hit me like a bolt of lightning.

"The dignitaries from Star University may arrive at any time.

So, you need to be prepared and avoid going outside until then."

My heart skipped a beat.

This was the news I had been waiting for, but I hadn't expected to hear it so soon.

The opportunity to attend a Tier-4 university, especially one like Star University, was a dream I had only dared to hope for.

And yet, now that the moment was approaching, uncertainty gnawed at me.

Swallowing my nerves, I looked at Head Ben and asked, “Elder, are there going to be specific requirements?”

I had no idea what criteria they would use for selection.

Yes, I had managed to impress them during their last visit, but that didn’t guarantee anything.

I could feel the tension creeping back into my thoughts-was my performance enough?

Or would there be other factors I hadn’t anticipated?

Ben’s expression softened, as if he could read the anxiety in my mind.

He had always been perceptive, and I could tell he understood my concerns.

“To be honest, Zack, I’m hoping they won’t change their minds,” he began, his voice a little lower, as if sharing a private thought.

“But things are complicated right now.

When they first considered you, they were optimistic about recruiting you.”

He paused, his eyes growing distant, as if recalling recent events.

“But after that serious incident in our inner post region...

well, the forces in the Tier-4 region have become much more serious about security.

We don’t know how this will affect their decision-making.”

His words hung heavy in the air.

The “incident” he was referring to had thrown everything into chaos, casting a shadow over what had once seemed like a clear path.

The Star University dignitaries might have been enthusiastic about me before, but now, in this volatile environment, their priorities could have shifted.

I nodded slowly, absorbing the gravity of the situation.

The opportunity was still there, but it was fragile, hanging by a thread amidst the uncertainty of the times.

I nodded in agreement with Head Ben’s response, though the unease still lingered.

We spoke briefly about a few other matters, mostly logistics and preparations, before I excused myself and left his office.

The weight of the conversation settled heavily on my mind, but there was little I could do now except wait for the Star University dignitaries to make their move.

...

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Alpha City

Meanwhile, across the sprawling city of Alpha, a different storm was brewing.

In a dimly lit room deep within the city's hideout the Vulture Gang Leader paced back and forth, his face twisted in a mix of impatience and fury.

The once-controlled simmer of anger was now dangerously close to boiling over.

Word of his missing hunting team had spread like wildfire, fueling speculation and fear.

Alpha City, known for its delicate balance of power between rival gangs, was now a pressure cooker of suspicion and paranoia.

Every gang in the city had heard about the incident.

They all knew that a fully-armed team, one that had never failed a mission before, had vanished without a trace.

But no one knew who had orchestrated the attack or why.

The Vulture Gang Leader clenched his fists, his mind racing through the possibilities.

This wasn't just a random hit.

It was calculated-deliberate.

And it had sent shockwaves through Alpha City's underworld.

Each gang, powerful in its own right, was now pointing fingers at the others.

None could be trusted, especially since many had the backing of powerful "core members"-elite warriors who operated from the shadows, pulling strings from behind the scenes.

These core members weren't just your average gang enforcers.

They were Silver Mark Warriors and Black Mark Warriors, individuals whose strength was unmatched by ordinary fighters.

Their rivalries were deep-rooted, and over the years, countless feuds and grudges had festered beneath the surface.

Any one of them could have ordered this attack, using it as a way to send a message or assert dominance.

The Vulture Leader slammed his fist onto the wooden table, causing it to creak under the force.

His eyes burned with frustration.

He knew that if he didn't figure out who was responsible-and fast-his gang would be vulnerable.

The other gangs would smell blood in the water, and in a city like Alpha, that was as good as a death sentence.

Outside the room, his lieutenants stood on edge, waiting for orders.

The tension in the air was palpable.

Everyone knew that one wrong move could ignite an all-out gang war, and Alpha City was no stranger to such chaos.

But this time, the stakes felt higher.

Whoever had orchestrated this attack wasn't just after territory-they were after power.

...

Somewhere in the shadows of Alpha City, in the depths of an old warehouse, a group of gang members gathered around a dimly lit table.

Their faces were tense, their voices hushed.

The topic of their conversation was one name: Zack Lockwood.

The gang, known for its ruthlessness in the underworld, had heard the rumors.

Zack Lockwood, the promising student of Lowell McClain, had visited Alpha City recently.

His presence here had stirred more than just curiosity; it had sparked an underlying tension within the city's criminal network.

A few days earlier, one of their hunting teams had tried to stop Zack Lockwood from leaving the city.

.Yet, despite their best efforts, the team had failed.

Zack had not only evaded them, but there hadn't been a scratch on him.

It was as if their attempt hadn't even registered on his radar.

Around the table, the atmosphere was thick with frustration and unease.

The gang members exchanged uneasy glances, aware that their failure wouldn't sit well with their backer-a powerful core member whose influence kept the gang's operations running smoothly.

And this backer had a personal stake in the matter.

His longstanding rivalry with Lowell McClain was no secret.

The two were like fire and ice, clashing whenever their paths crossed.

Their feud had deepened over the years, and the appearance of Zack Lockwood in Alpha City was like throwing fuel on a smoldering fire.

One of the gang members, a scarred veteran, spoke up, his voice dripping with tension.

“The moment we found out he’s McClain’s student, we should have pulled back.

We can’t afford to get tangled in their rivalry.

Our backer might not care about the consequences, but if we provoke McClain!”

The rest of the group murmured in agreement.

They all knew that Lowell McClain wasn’t someone to be trifled with.

Not only was he a respected core member, but his reputation as a fierce warrior and a protective mentor to Zack made him a dangerous enemy.

The gang wasn’t sure what had brought Zack to Alpha City in the first place, but they knew enough to stay clear of him now.

“Do you think our backer will make a move?” one of them asked, his voice low, almost fearful.

The leader of the group, a grizzled man with cold eyes, leaned forward.

"He will," he said, his tone grim.

"He's been waiting for a chance to strike at McClain, and now that his student is involved, it's personal."

A heavy silence followed.

They all knew what that meant.

Their backer would push them to make another attempt, perhaps something more drastic this time.

But if they failed again-or worse, if they directly crossed paths with McClain-there would be hell to pay.

The leader stood up, his face set in a determined scowl.

"We wait for orders.

But whatever happens next, we need to tread carefully.

This isn't just about Alpha City anymore-it's about power, influence, and the core members who control it.

And if we're not careful, we'll end up as collateral in their war."

The gang members nodded in silent agreement.

Their fate, it seemed, was no longer in their hands, but entangled in the dangerous rivalry between two powerful forces: their backer and Lowell McClain.

And Zack Lockwood was right at the center of it all.

Now, they have to make some serious decisions.

If Zack Lockwood appears in future.

They have to do something.

Otherwise, the consequences would be serious.

Because the current situation of the inner post region is difficult.

They have to wait and watch how things would turn out.

At the same time, they were also paying attention to the matter of missing hunting team.

They were clear that they didn't do it.

Chapter 936: Officials arrived!

From the MC's Perspective:

The news about the Tier-4 Region was like a storm sweeping through the inner post region, causing ripples that could no longer be ignored.

Forces that had long held grudges and were on the brink of conflict found themselves forced to set aside their animosities.

For the moment, their primary focus had shifted-every faction now had its eyes on securing a spot for their warriors in the prestigious Tier-4 universities.

This development brought a surprising sense of calm to an otherwise tense atmosphere.

Even typically hostile groups like the Blood Force and their bitter rivals seemed to cool their tempers.

The once-feared Eclipse Academy and the formidable Giant Tower Academy, known for their cutthroat competition, had adopted a rare air of civility, behaving with an unusual decorum.

Across the Federation, the response was much the same.

Core members of the Federation quickly issued directives to their affiliate gangs, urging them to stay low and avoid internal strife.

No one wanted their power plays or territorial disputes to distract from the larger opportunity looming over them.

The news was too significant to risk disruption over petty infighting.

Before the Federation Head could even issue formal orders, the gang leaders in Alpha City were already breathing a collective sigh of relief.

The ever-present threat of retaliation or power struggles had lessened, at least for now.

The head of the notorious Vulture Gang, a man constantly walking a tightrope between appeasing his backers and maintaining control, allowed himself a rare moment of ease.

He had feared being summoned by the core member behind the gang for failing to handle some pressing issues, but the news from the Tier-4 Region had bought him a temporary reprieve.

Now, he could shelve the matter entirely and redirect his focus elsewhere.

Likewise, other gangs who had been discussing Zack Lockwood's teacher found themselves unexpectedly spared from immediate pressure.

There was a collective shift in focus as warriors from every corner now set their sights on the same goal: securing a coveted place in the Tier-4 universities.

Their attention had turned to the greater prize, and for the time being, the undercurrents of violence and revenge were replaced with preparation and ambition.

...

A week later, the Inner Post Region awoke to another wave of exhilarating news.

It was official: representatives from the Tier-4 Region had finally arrived.

These weren't just any visitors-they were esteemed officials from the six top universities and other influential organizations.

Their presence alone sent shockwaves of excitement and anticipation throughout the region.

Among them, the officials from the prestigious Star University had made their way directly to the Army Federation, a move that sent a clear message: the stakes were high, and the best of the best were scouting for talent.

In parallel, the other universities dispatched their representatives to various top-tier organizations, elite clans, and powerful families.

The arrival of these envoys ignited a frenzy among those hoping to secure an audience or a recommendation.

Inside the headquarters of the Federation, Head Ben paced back and forth in his office, the tension rolling off him in waves.

He had just received the news that the officials were coming to meet with him, and the gravity of the moment weighed heavily on his mind.

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His first instinct was to summon Zack Lockwood immediately, his mind racing with possibilities.

Zack was a rising star-an asset that could prove invaluable.

But Ben hesitated.

These officials, with their inscrutable agendas and complex power dynamics, could be unpredictable.

If he acted rashly and summoned Zack too early, without a clear request from them, it could easily backfire, jeopardizing Zack's chances or even the Federation's standing with the Tier-4 powers.

Patience, Ben reminded himself.

He would wait for their cue.

Only when they asked for Zack would he make his move.

Any misstep now could ripple into something much larger, and the Federation couldn't afford that.

One hour later, Federation Head Ben stood at the secret teleportation platform, a hidden asset known only to a select few.

The platform, concealed in the most secure depths of the Headquarters, was designed for exclusive use by Tier-5 officials and Ben himself, a symbol of the Federation's elite status.

As the familiar hum of the platform activated, Ben braced himself for what came next.

The arrival of these officials signaled the beginning of a critical chapter, not just for Zack or the Federation, but for the entire Inner Post Region.

Ben stood at the edge of the platform, his gaze fixed on the cold metal surface.

The ground beneath his feet rumbled softly, a faint hum filling the air.

Then, in a flash, the platform erupted in a brilliant glow, flooding the room with a sharp, electric light.

In the next breath, two figures emerged from the radiance-warriors clad in gleaming white armor that shimmered under the light.

One was a tall, imposing male with a sharp jawline, his eyes like burning embers beneath his helmet.

The other, a fierce female with an air of lethal grace, stood beside him, her expression unreadable, but her presence overwhelming.

Both exuded power, their movements synchronized as if they were two halves of a single force.

Ben's breath caught in his throat.

He felt his body stiffen, as though he had been turned to stone.

These two warriors-representatives of the infamous Star University-radiated an aura so intense, it pressed down on him like the weight of a collapsing star.

He had heard rumors of their prowess, but to feel it firsthand was a different reality altogether.

For a moment, his thoughts spiraled.

How could this be?

He was no ordinary fighter.

He was one of the few Gold Mark Warriors in the region, a title that symbolized unmatched strength and skill.

And yet, standing before these two, a cold, unfamiliar sensation crept into his chest.

Fear.

It was more than just their presence.

The very air around them crackled with unseen energy, a palpable danger that made his skin crawl.

A bead of sweat slid down his brow as his heart pounded violently in his chest.

Despite himself, he could feel the grim shadow of death hanging in the air, its icy breath brushing against his skin.

They are representatives?

Ben's mind raced.

But now, faced with the overwhelming pressure emanating from these warriors, he didn't dare question their identity any further.

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Meanwhile, I paced restlessly in my room, my fingers clenched tightly around the phone as I spoke to my teacher.

The dim light of the room seemed oppressive, amplifying the tension bubbling within me.

Teacher had just informed me of the arrival of Tier-4 region officials-a monumental event.

Ever since I heard the news, my heart had been racing, refusing to calm down.

“Zack, don’t let this shake you,” Lowell’s voice echoed through the call, calm but firm.

“You must realize, you are likely their prime candidate.

Remember, you’re a lightning warrior.

Lightning element warriors are in high demand at these universities.”

I inhaled sharply, trying to steady my breathing.

Teacher Lowell was right.

Lightning warriors were rare, coveted even.

It was a talent that put me in a unique position, and yet, doubt gnawed at me from within.

“But even with that,” I began, my voice wavering slightly, “my strength rank is low.

What if that’s all they see?”

Lowell’s tone softened, but remained resolute.

“Your rank may be lower than others, but the lightning element isn’t something to underestimate.

It can be your advantage-your edge in ways rank alone can’t compete with.”

I nodded to myself, the words making sense, but still...

there was something else.

Something unpredictable.

“I understand, teacher,” I replied, my voice quieter.

“It’s just-you never know about the variables.

What if something goes wrong?

What if I’m not as prepared as I think?”

Lowell’s voice grew more serious.

“In ordinary times, you might be right to worry.

Variables would matter more.

But this isn't an ordinary time, Zack.

These forces, these universities-they're not just looking for warriors anymore.

They need the next generation of fighters.

They need those who can rise beyond the rank of Gold Mark Warrior."

The weight of his words settled heavily on my shoulders.

It was true.

This wasn't just about me, or even the other candidates.

The future was at stake, and the universities were seeking those who could shape it.

"Yeah, I get it," I said, my voice firmer this time.

Still, the unknown loomed large, but Lowell's reassurance kept me grounded, if only for the moment.

The pressure was immense, but so was the opportunity ahead.

We talked for a few minutes before ending the call.

The teacher said he would only come if summoned by the Federation Head.

He wants to avoid any unnecessary drama.

All other core members are behaving well right now.

If the teacher were to appear without being called, it would raise a lot of questions.

Overthinking is hurting.

After calming down my heart, I removed these unnecessary thoughts and began to wait patiently.

Chapter 937: Namelist

Federation Headquarters:

The towering structure of the Federation Headquarters stood imposingly under the clear sky, its gleaming metal exterior reflecting the sunlight.

Inside, the atmosphere was tense.

The Federation Head, Ben, stood nervously before two intimidating figures: Clinton Francis and Sally Johns, both legends in their own right.

Clinton, a man who appeared to be in his mid-forties, possessed an aura that could shake entire armies.

His well-defined features and sharp eyes revealed the years of experience and battles he had fought, although his actual age was a well-guarded secret that could astonish even the oldest warriors.

Beside him stood Sally Johns, an equally fearsome warrior, with a cold yet dignified presence.

Her tall frame and piercing blue eyes made her seem untouchable, her beauty as striking as her strength.

Both were warriors of extraordinary caliber, far beyond the Gold Mark Warrior Rank, and they carried with them the authority of Star University, an institution that shaped the future of the galaxy's mightiest fighters.

Noticing the beads of sweat on Ben's forehead, Clinton and Sally, in a silent understanding, gently restrained the overwhelming pressure of their aura.

In an instant, their presence diminished, making them appear like ordinary individuals-an illusion that only the most powerful could manage.

"Your name is Ben, right?" Clinton asked, his voice deep and commanding, yet not unkind.

Ben, who had been standing stiff as a board, nodded vigorously.

"Yes, my Lord.

I'm Ben, the current head of the Army Federation," he stammered, clearly trying to maintain his composure.

Without wasting any more time, Ben gestured towards a hidden corridor.

"I will take you to the office without delay."

Clinton gave a brief nod, and Sally's eyes flickered with acknowledgment as they began to follow Ben through a discreet, heavily secured passage that led to the uppermost floor of the headquarters.

The room they entered was lavishly furnished, though not ostentatious-designed more for comfort and functionality than grandeur.

At the center was a large, polished desk with two high-backed chairs on one side and a single chair on the other.

Clinton and Sally sat down behind the desk, their demeanor calm yet authoritative, while Ben seated himself across from them, every muscle in his body tense as he awaited their orders.

Clinton's sharp gaze swept the room once more before finally settling on Ben.

He leaned forward slightly, his hands clasped in front of him.

"I won't waste your time.

We are here to select warriors to join the ranks of Star University," he began, his tone clipped and businesslike, though it carried the weight of someone used to being obeyed without question.

Sally, who had been silent until now, spoke up, her voice as cold and precise as her reputation.

"We're selecting warriors starting from SSS-ELITE Rank to those just below the Black Mark Warrior level," she clarified.

"The best of the best.

Only those capable of surviving the trials will be considered."

Ben nodded eagerly.

He knew what this meant.

For the warriors of the Federation, this was an opportunity of a lifetime.

To be chosen by Star University was a path to greatness-if they survived the grueling selection process.

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Ben sat nervously at the desk, his fingers tapping softly against the cool surface as he pushed two copies of the name list across to Clinton and Sally.

He had spent days meticulously curating the names, selecting warriors whose talents and elemental affinities were far above the average.

For the Federation, these names represented the best of the best.

But for Star University, this was merely the entry standard.

The university's reputation was legendary, only accepting warriors who had the potential to reshape the Tier-4 region with their power.

Ben was well aware of this, and though he had chosen the most qualified candidates, an uneasy feeling gnawed at him.

Clinton and Sally took the lists, their expressions unreadable as they began to flip through the names, their eyes scanning each with practiced efficiency.

Every so often, one of them would pause for a brief second, likely recognizing a family name or a particular warrior's reputation, before moving on to the next.

The silence in the room was deafening, the only sound being the faint rustling of paper.

As Ben watched them examine the lists, his mind drifted to the one name that wasn't there-Zack Lockwood.

Zack was a warrior of remarkable potential, but he was just shy of reaching the SSS-ELITE Rank.

The selection process for Star University only considered those warriors who had already attained this rank or higher, and unfortunately, Zack had not yet reached that milestone.

Ben had wrestled with the decision, but in the end, he couldn't include Zack on the list.

Should I feel relieved or regretful?

Ben thought.

The officials had arrived earlier than expected, leaving Zack little time to reach the rank required for consideration.

If they had come just a few weeks later, Ben was almost certain Zack would have broken through to SSS-ELITE.

Now, Zack's opportunity to join Star University, at least for this selection cycle, seemed to have slipped through his fingers.

Ben glanced at Clinton and Sally, still deep in review.

Would Zack even want this?

He wondered.

Star University was a double-edged sword.

It could turn a warrior into a legend, but the trials and competition were ruthless.

A warrior who wasn't fully prepared could be destroyed-either in spirit or body.

Perhaps it was a blessing that Zack wasn't on the list yet.

Still, his absence gnawed at Ben.

Zack wasn't just any warrior; he was special, with a rare combination of talent and drive.

Given just a little more time, Ben was certain Zack could surpass many of the warriors whose names now sat in front of Clinton and Sally.

The names they were reviewing consisted of the best the Federation had to offer-warriors from the top families and most powerful clans.

These weren't just skilled fighters; many were core members of influential families, the next generation poised to strengthen their lineage's influence within the Federation.

If even a handful of these family members were selected, their families' political standing within the Federation would become even stronger, tilting the already delicate balance of power.

Ben's thoughts wandered further down that dangerous path, imagining the political maneuvering that would follow the selection.

Families would use their standing at Star University as leverage, alliances would be formed, old rivalries intensified, and the internal politics of the Federation would grow even more complex.

It could lead to internal friction, destabilizing the delicate balance he had worked so hard to maintain.

No, focus.

He shook his head slightly, mentally pushing away those concerns.

This was not the time to worry about political ramifications.

His task was to ensure that only the most capable warriors were put forward for Star University.

Whatever came afterward would be dealt with in time.

He watched as Clinton turned a page and then exchanged a glance with Sally, who nodded subtly.

They were approaching the end of the list, but Ben's heart rate didn't slow.

All he could do now was wait for their verdict.

A few minutes passed in silence as Clinton and Sally finished reviewing the lists, their expressions serious but calm.

Finally, Clinton broke the quiet, setting the papers down with a firm hand.

"Alright," he began, his voice steady and authoritative, "we can't select all of them.

The number of seats available is limited, and we only want the best.

So, we'll select 300 warriors to start.

These 300 will undergo trials back at Star University."

He paused, glancing at Ben before continuing, "Among those, only the top 150 or 200 will be chosen, based on their performance during the trials.

The rest won't make it through."

Clinton's words carried a weight that hung in the air.

The idea that more than half of the selected warriors would fail-and potentially lose their futures-was sobering.

Ben had seen firsthand how brutal Star University's trials were, where even the most skilled warriors could fall short if they weren't fully prepared.

Clinton turned to Sally.

"What do you think?" he asked, his tone suggesting that he valued her opinion greatly.

Sally's eyes, cold and calculating, scanned the room for a moment before she responded.

"300 is fine," she agreed.

"Only the truly talented will survive the trials.

If we recruit too many, we risk unnecessary losses.

Those who aren't ready will meet their end, either in body or spirit.

The weaker ones don't belong in Star University."

Her words were as sharp as her reputation, and Ben couldn't help but nod inwardly.

She was right-Star University wasn't a place for the faint of heart.

Only the elite would make it, and those who weren't up to the challenge could face fatal consequences.

As Ben listened to their conversation, he began to feel a sense of relief.

Despite their terrifying reputation, both Clinton and Sally seemed rational and approachable.

They weren't needlessly cruel or dismissive, but instead, focused on ensuring that only those who could truly handle the rigors of Star University would be given the opportunity.

Feeling a bit more confident, a thought crept into Ben's mind-Zack Lockwood.

He could feel the urge to speak up bubbling inside him.

This might be the only chance to bring up Zack's name, and now that Clinton and Sally had shown themselves to be reasonable, Ben believed they might listen.

Chapter 938: Slim chance

Federation Headquarters:

Ben stood with a firm resolve, the weight of his words already pressing on his mind as he turned to face the two figures in the room.

He cleared his throat before addressing them.

"Lord, I have something to tell you."

The atmosphere shifted slightly as Clinton and Sally turned their attention towards him, their expressions neutral but expectant.

"What is it?" Clinton asked, his deep voice cutting through the silence.

Ben took a measured breath.

"I have a candidate in mind.

His name is Zack Lockwood.

He's reached the Peak Stage of SS-ELITE, and I've already recommended his name once before."

A flicker of recognition passed through Clinton's eyes, but he remained silent as Ben continued.

"The officials had shown interest in him previously, asking me to keep an eye on his progress."

As Ben finished speaking, a sudden wave of anxiety gripped him.

His heart began to race, each beat louder than the last as he awaited their response.

Would they take his suggestion seriously?

He could only hope that this moment would be the turning point for Zack.

Clinton raised his eyebrows thoughtfully, his gaze growing distant as if searching the corridors of his memory.

He seemed to recall something-faint, but just out of reach.

Zack Lockwood...

yes, the name had come up once before.

Back at the university, perhaps?

Yet the specifics eluded him.

Before he could dig deeper into the memory, Sally spoke, her voice sharp with curiosity.

“Is that the kid who’s a lightning warrior?”

Her question hung in the air, laced with intrigue.

The mention of lightning warriors was always met with attention.

Such warriors, born with the rare and coveted lightning element, were few and far between, even in the Tier-4 regions.

Sally’s eyes gleamed as she pieced together her recollection.

Of course, Zack Lockwood would be memorable for that reason alone.

“That’s right,” Clinton said, a smile tugging at the corners of his mouth.

The fog in his mind lifted as everything came rushing back.

“Someone did mention him to me as well.”

Now the pieces were falling into place.

Both Clinton and Sally were aware of Zack’s potential, and it was no coincidence that they had kept tabs on him.

After all, the Federation was always on the lookout for promising young warriors, especially those with rare elemental affinities like Zack’s.

The future of the Federation depended on such talents, and Zack Lockwood might very well be one of those who would shape that future.

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Federation Head Ben felt an immense weight lift from his shoulders.

He had been anxious, anticipating resistance or doubt, but never had he expected that Clinton and Sally, two of the most powerful warriors in the Federation, were already familiar with Zack Lockwood.

He couldn't help but think it was all thanks to Zack's rare lightning element.

The uniqueness of that power was enough to make anyone stand out.

A smile spread across Ben's face, a quiet sense of pride swelling within him.

Clinton and Sally exchanged a brief, knowing look.

It was clear that they were silently coming to some sort of decision, weighing the potential against the risks.

"That kid has potential," Sally began, her voice steady but somber.

"But his current strength is far too low.

Even an average SSS-ELITE Rank warrior would be nothing more than cannon fodder in those trials."

Ben's smile faltered slightly as her words settled in.

Sally's expression was stern, the weight of her experiences behind each word.

She had seen too many promising warriors fall to dismiss the danger lightly.

"She's right," Clinton agreed, his tone grave.

"Even if we select him, he'll have to face the trials.

And frankly, the chances of his survival are slim."

Ben felt a cold chill run down his spine at Clinton's words.

He knew the trials were brutal, but hearing it confirmed by someone like Clinton made it feel all the more real.

Clinton, a warrior who had seen countless battles and risen through the ranks, knew exactly how dangerous those trials were.

Clinton sighed inwardly, his face hardening with a mixture of resignation and concern.

He knew the horrors that awaited any participant.

The trials were unforgiving, designed to break even the strongest.

No warrior below the SSS-ELITE Rank had ever survived them.

In fact, not even the finest SS-ELITE warriors from their Tier-4 region dared to enter.

The trials demanded not just raw strength, but skill, cunning, and an ability to fight across ranks-a feat few could manage.

The room fell into a heavy silence, the weight of their discussion pressing down on all three of them.

Ben's earlier relief had been replaced with apprehension.

He wanted to believe in Zack's potential, but the harsh reality of the trials loomed large.

Even Clinton and Sally, with all their power, knew better than to underestimate the challenge.

The quiet stretched on, each of them contemplating whether Zack Lockwood, with all his promise, could truly survive what lay ahead.

Federation Head Ben's heart skipped a beat, a rush of unease flooding his chest.

Everything had seemed to be going well, but the harsh reality of the trials' criteria hit him like a cold wave.

The rules were unbending-no warrior below the SSS-ELITE Rank could participate, and those rules could only be altered by someone with authority from Star University.

And that, Ben knew, was no small feat.

A dark premonition settled in his gut as he glanced nervously at Clinton and Sally.

Both of their expressions had hardened.

Time was running out, and he had to make them see that Zack wasn't just some ordinary SS-ELITE warrior.

In a moment of desperation, Ben spoke, his voice betraying the tension rising in him.

“Zack is on the verge of breaking through.

I believe he’ll reach the SSS-ELITE Rank before the trials.”

Clinton’s frown deepened, his gaze sharp and skeptical.

He crossed his arms over his chest, clearly not convinced.

To him, Ben’s words felt like an empty promise, a desperate attempt to push Zack through the system.

He understood the value of a lightning warrior-few could rival such raw elemental power-but rules were rules.

No warrior, no matter their potential, was exempt from the rigorous standards set by the Federation.

“You’re asking us to gamble on a breakthrough,” Clinton said, his tone steady but firm.

“But we can’t rely on a ‘maybe’ when lives are at stake.”

Sally, however, was more blunt.

Her eyes narrowed slightly as she cut in.

“It’s impossible to change the rules, Ben.

We can’t admit warriors below the SSS-ELITE Rank.

The trials are too dangerous.

Allowing anyone weaker would be a death sentence.”

Her words felt like a hammer striking down, final and resolute.

Tud!

The sound seemed to echo in Ben’s chest as her words landed.

He felt a crushing weight settle over his heart, as if a heavy stone had been dropped onto him.

All the optimism he had harbored earlier was crumbling under the cold reality Sally had laid out.

Ben knew the risks, but hearing them so starkly-and knowing there was no room for negotiation-made the situation feel insurmountable.

Zack Lockwood, with all his potential, might not even get the chance to prove himself.

And in this world, opportunities like this were rare-almost impossible to come by twice.

Ben stood there, frozen, the weight of failure looming larger with every passing second.

Sally could see through Ben’s troubled expression, reading the silent plea behind his words.

She understood his frustration-Zack Lockwood was an exceptional talent, and to let such potential go unrecognized would indeed be a tragedy.

Worse still, Zack wasn’t just any warrior; he was a rare lightning warrior, a breed so scarce that even in the most elite circles, they were spoken of with reverence.

To deny him a chance at greatness now, when he was on the cusp of something more, felt almost criminal to her.

Her sharp mind quickly processed the current state of affairs.

This wasn't an ordinary time for the Tier-4 region.

With tensions rising and older warriors falling out of favor, the need for fresh talent had never been greater.

Every major force was scrambling to secure the next generation of warriors, and universities were relaxing their strict standards, quietly desperate to replenish their ranks.

The trials, while still dangerous, were being slightly softened to accommodate this influx.

This was Zack's moment, his window of opportunity.

If it had been during a period of peace, when the Federation wasn't so starved for new talent, the chances of Zack even being considered would have been slim.

Sally knew that under normal circumstances, the university would have trimmed down the trial candidates from hundreds to mere dozens-perhaps only the top 50 out of the 300 would have stood a chance.

But now, with every faction needing new blood, even someone on the verge of a breakthrough, like Zack, could be considered.

"This is the right time," Sally thought to herself, her mind calculating the possibilities.

While the rules were rigid, the political landscape was shifting, and that shift created gaps-gaps where someone like Zack might just slip through.

She glanced at Ben again, softening her earlier stance.

She, too, knew the weight of responsibility that came with nurturing the next generation.

Denying someone like Zack the chance to fight would not only be a loss for him but also for the Federation as a whole.

Still, the trials would be brutal, and no amount of talent could change that.

Chapter 939: Part 1: Test

Federation Headquarters:

Silence descended over the room like a heavy fog.

The tension was palpable, thick enough to cut through.

Moments ago, Clinton and Sally had made their stance clear-rules were rules, and breaking them would have serious consequences.

Yet, there was no denying the significance of Zack Lockwood.

A lightning warrior was an invaluable asset, especially one with his potential.

If he slipped through their fingers and was snatched up by another organization, it would be a devastating loss for Star University.

Ben, seated across from them, was clearly not ready to give up.

His eyes burned with determination, unwilling to let the opportunity slip away.

He knew the weight Clinton and Sally carried in the Star University-their authority, their experience.

If anyone could find a loophole or a creative solution, it was them.

“Is there no other way?” Ben asked, his voice a mixture of hope and desperation.

Clinton and Sally exchanged a look.

They didn’t need to speak to know they were both weighing the possibilities.

There was a quiet understanding between them, forged through years of navigating the complex hierarchy of the Star University.Â

Sally’s eyes gleamed for a moment, as if a thought had just occurred to her.

She shifted slightly, signaling to Clinton that she might have an idea.

Clinton, perceptive as ever, noticed her subtle change in demeanor.

His brow furrowed for a moment before he realized what she was thinking.

He met her gaze with a silent question, and Sally gave the barest nod, confirming that she had a potential solution.

But it wasn’t without risks.

“Could you step outside for a minute, Ben?”

“We need to discuss something privately,” Clinton said, his tone firm but not unkind.

Ben's face lit up with a glimmer of hope.

He stood up eagerly, a wide smile stretching across his face.

Without a word, he nodded and quickly left the room, closing the door quietly behind him.

The silence that followed his departure was thick with unspoken tension.

Once Ben was out of earshot, Clinton turned towards Sally, his expression serious.

"So, what's on your mind?" he asked, leaning forward slightly.

Sally sighed, a hint of caution in her voice.

"We can't recruit that kid according to the official rules.

The guidelines are clear, and if we go against them, we'll face consequences.

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Worse, the people in our Tier-4 region will see it as an opportunity to exploit our decision and use it against us."

Clinton's expression hardened.

"You're right.

The political landscape there is more cutthroat than anything we deal with here.

Any wrong move and they'll pounce on it." His mind began to churn, weighing the pros and cons of taking any action that would jeopardize their position.

Sally nodded, her eyes sharp with understanding.

But there might be a way around it.

If we can't recruit Zack officially, we might be able to do it indirectly.

Perhaps we can offer him a different kind of mentorship, a training program that keeps him within our influence without officially making him part of the university.

Sally's smile widened as the idea took shape in her mind.

"We can't recruit the kid directly," she said, her voice calm but laced with a hint of cunning.

"But you could recommend him to someone-a specific someone who could take him under their wing as a disciple.

That way, Zack Lockwood wouldn't need to go through the dangerous trial process."

Clinton's eyes flickered with sudden realization.

The solution was clever, subtle, and avoided breaking any of the Star University's rigid rules.

He glanced at Sally, then fell silent, letting the implications sink in.

In Star University, there were several powerful warriors who wielded lightning abilities, and many of them held prestigious positions-Teachers, Elders, even individuals in higher-ranking roles who commanded immense respect.

The university was divided into various departments and factions, each with its own hierarchy of influence.

Sally's idea was to bypass the standard recruitment process and go straight to one of these influential figures.

If someone with a high enough rank took Zack Lockwood as a disciple, it would solve their problem neatly.

Not only would they avoid the bureaucratic mess of recruitment, but it would also position Clinton as the one who had recommended such a promising seed to a respected elder.

Gaining the favor of a powerful figure was no small thing in Star University, where alliances and recommendations often shaped the political landscape.

More than that, it would strengthen the university as a whole.

A talent like Zack Lockwood, a lightning warrior, could become one of their greatest assets if nurtured correctly.

The university had always prided itself on producing the best warriors, and a rare talent like Zack would only add to its prestige.

Clinton was deep in thought, his mind running through the names of potential candidates.

Several warriors with lightning affinities came to mind, but it wasn't just about finding someone powerful.

It had to be the right person-someone who would take Zack seriously, someone whose reputation would not only benefit Zack but also enhance Star University's standing.

Sally noticed his contemplative look and broke the silence.

"What's on your mind?" she asked, her eyes gleaming with anticipation.

"I know exactly what you mean," Clinton said, a smile forming on his lips.

"In order to recommend Zack to a certain elder, though, we'll need to test him first.

If he's as talented as we think, there's no doubt they'll accept him.

But we can't present him without proof of his abilities."

Sally nodded, her smile returning.

"Exactly.

If Zack can pass a private test, it will be enough to convince any elder worth their salt.

And the best part is, we'll be able to avoid the politics surrounding the standard recruitment process.

It's a win for everyone."

Clinton's smile deepened.

He could already see the pieces falling into place.

By recommending Zack, he would not only help the boy bypass a dangerous trial but also secure his own position within the university's intricate web of power.

Sally's smile widened as she continued, "Lightning warriors are rare, especially in the Tier-4 region.

Even among the most developed areas, there are only a few young talents with such a unique affinity." She paused, her expression thoughtful.

"But what's more impressive is that Zack is growing at an extraordinary rate in a region that's underdeveloped in terms of resources and opportunities."

Clinton nodded in agreement, her words solidifying his decision.

"Exactly.

If he's this promising now, we can only imagine what he'll be capable of with the right guidance and resources.

Summoning him for a test will show us just how far he's come-and if his potential is as great as we think, I can confidently recommend him to one of the elders."

Without wasting any time, Clinton reached for his communicator and summoned Ben, the Federation Head, back into the room.

Moments later, the door opened, and Ben stepped in, his expression hopeful.

"We've found a solution," Clinton said, leaning forward.

"First, we'll need to summon Zack Lockwood.

We want to test his abilities ourselves to make sure he's the real deal.

If he passes, we'll know exactly who to recommend him to."

Ben's face lit up with relief and excitement.

"Of course!" he said, eager to move forward.

Without hesitation, he contacted Zack.

—

From MC's Perspective:

Meanwhile!

I was in my room, lying on the bed, trying to relax after a long day when my communicator suddenly buzzed.

I glanced at the screen, and my heart skipped a beat when I saw the call was from the Federation Head, Ben.

I knew immediately what this meant-they were summoning me.

I could feel the tension in my chest tighten as I answered the call.

"Zack, come to my office immediately," Ben's voice came through, calm but firm.

"Yes, Elder," I responded, my voice steady despite the nerves beginning to churn in my stomach.

As soon as the call ended, I wiped my forehead, realizing that I had begun to sweat.

The weight of what was about to happen hit me.

This was it-the opportunity I had been waiting for, but also the moment I had dreaded.

They were going to test me, and everything I'd worked for would be on the line.

I walked over to the mirror, taking a moment to steady myself.

My reflection stared back at me, eyes sharp, determination flickering behind the tension.

I straightened my clothes, making sure I looked presentable.

My heart was racing, but I couldn't afford to show weakness now.

With one final deep breath, I turned and left the room, heading toward the office.

My fate was waiting, and I was ready to face whatever came next.

Meanwhile, the three of them were waiting patiently.

Shortly after, I arrived at the top floor.

As the elevator doors slid open, I stepped out.

I was gripped by a sense of dread as my heart raced uncontrollably.

With a glimmer of hope, I pushed open the door and stepped into the room.

Chapter 940: Part 2: Test

From MC's Perspective:

When I stepped into the room, the air seemed to thicken, tension radiating from every corner.

Two new faces sat behind the main desk, their expressions unreadable but intense.

Across from them sat the Federation Head, his usual calm demeanor masking the weight of the moment.

Their gazes locked onto mine the moment I entered.

A creeping dread coiled in my chest, tightening with each passing second.

I didn't know what to think, let alone what to do.

Something about their presence made me feel exposed, as if every secret I carried was laid bare.

They were studying me now.

Not just looking at me-but through me.

Their eyes felt like needles, sharp and probing.

It was unsettling, like they could peel back the layers of my existence with a mere glance.

The silver ring on my finger, usually a reliable safeguard against prying eyes, seemed utterly powerless in their presence.

I felt a pang of vulnerability as their stares deepened, probing beyond what should be possible.

Clinton's gaze flickered, a subtle shift as if he had discovered something hidden beneath the surface.

His brow furrowed ever so slightly, and I could sense him reaching a conclusion.

His eyes had found the truth-red skeleton.

A look of surprise rippled across his face as he seemed to peer even further, noticing the intricate, almost imperceptible runes etched across every inch of bone.

"What is this?" he thought, his curiosity deepening.

A moment passed before his expression shifted again, realization dawning in his eyes.

"Bone strengthening," he muttered internally.

But even that didn't explain everything.

The red color of the skeleton-that wasn't typical of any bone-practice he'd seen before.

His heart raced as the answer hit him.

Blood element.

A rare and powerful force, even more elusive than the coveted lightning element.

Clinton had encountered plenty of lightning element warriors in Tier-4 regions, but blood element warriors?

Those were near mythical.

History books spoke of an age where multiple blood element warriors roamed the lands.

But that era had long since passed.

Nowadays, finding even one was a rarity, a legend almost forgotten.

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Earlier, Clinton and Sally had been debating his potential, weighing the decision to recruit him based on his lightning affinity alone.

They had discussed subtle methods to bring me into their fold.

But now?

The discovery of the blood element erased any doubts.

The lightning element was powerful, yes, but the blood element-it overshadowed everything else.

Clinton's thoughts raced.

He knew the University Elders would scramble to recruit me unconditionally if they knew.

"If this kid gains access to blood element inheritance, no one will be able to stop him," he marveled, trying to mask his shock.

He shifted his focus to my dantian.

Among the familiar purple essence of the lightning element, something else caught his eye.

A small amount of mixed brown-green essence swirled within, faint but unmistakable.

“Another element?” he thought, eyes narrowing.

“Healing...

It has to be.”

His lips parted as if to say something, but he stopped himself, the weight of his discovery too great for words.

On the other side, Sally was equally floored.

Her composed exterior cracked as she processed the overwhelming reality.

She, too, had detected the presence of three elements-blood, lightning, and healing.

Though she couldn’t fully comprehend the cultivation method I was using, she could feel the raw potential coursing through me.

“Blood, lightning, and healing,” her mind echoed, the enormity of it all sending shockwaves through her thoughts.

Her gaze flickered toward the Federation Head, suspicion creeping in.

She had noticed something else-the silver ring on his finger.

A ring designed to shield him from the senses of warriors up to the Silver Rank, and to some extent, even from Gold Mark Warriors.

Why hadn't the Federation Head mentioned it?

Did he not know, or had he deliberately concealed it from them?

Her doubts lingered, but considering his recommendation of him, the second option seemed more likely.

The Federation Head knew more than he let on.

"Federation Head, could you give us a moment?" Sally's voice broke the silence, though it was polite, there was an edge of urgency to it.

"We would like to speak with him alone."

Clinton nodded in agreement.

He, too, was eager to dig deeper into the mystery of Zack Lockwood.

The questions burned in his mind, and he could hardly wait to unravel the answers.

"Okay," the Federation Head said as he rose from his seat.

His movements were unhurried, his face calm, as if expecting nothing more than a routine conversation about the trial.

He seemed confident that everything would go smoothly, unaware of the deeper revelations about to unfold.

With a final glance toward Zack, he exited the room, leaving me alone with Clinton and Sally.

"You're Zack Lockwood, right?"

Please, take a seat," Sally said, her smile warm but hiding something sharper beneath.

There was an air of calculation about her, a politeness laced with a desire to know more.

I nodded and moved to sit opposite them.

As I settled into the chair, I could feel their eyes on me again-probing, questioning, searching for answers I wasn't sure I was ready to give.

The room felt smaller somehow, the air thick with unspoken tension.

Sitting there, I realized this wasn't just a conversation; it was an interrogation cloaked in formality.

Clinton leaned forward slightly, his voice calm but direct.

"So, you have three rare elements?"

My heart skipped a beat at the question, a brief moment of shock rippling through me.

But I wasn't truly surprised.

Their earlier penetrating gazes had told me everything I needed to know-they had seen through the protective layers of my cultivation.

I quickly realized that these two were far stronger than the Federation Head, their powers far more advanced.

“Yes,” I replied, keeping my voice steady despite the tension in my chest.

“I have three elements.”

Clinton’s eyes gleamed, but it was Sally who spoke next.

“Your skeleton is red,” she began, her tone almost casual but her eyes sharp, “Is that because of the blood element, or is it a result of the bone strengthening method?”

I turned to her, my gaze meeting hers.

There was something unsettling about her, as if she could see even more than she was letting on.

“It’s due to both,” I answered carefully, “the blood element and the bone strengthening method.”

Sally nodded, her expression neutral, but I could tell she was processing every word, analyzing it.

“And the third element-is it healing?” Her voice was soft, but her eyes were intense, as if she already knew the answer.

I took a slow breath before responding.

“Yes, it’s healing.”

Sally didn’t hesitate before launching her next question.

“Where did you get a cultivation method for three elements?”

Her question hung in the air, weighty and filled with implication.

I could feel the intensity of both their gazes, and for a moment, I considered my answer carefully.

These two didn’t seem like the type to be easily satisfied with vague responses.

“I got the bone method from a library book at my home town academy,” I began, my voice steady as I laid out the truth, or at least, part of it.

“The lightning element method was given to me by my teacher, and the healing element...” I paused briefly, remembering the old man’s wrinkled face, his weathered hands offering me the knowledge.

“The healing element was passed down to me by an old healer at the outer post academy.”

I could feel their reactions even before they spoke.

Clinton’s interest was piqued, and Sally’s mind was racing with possibilities.

I knew I had to be careful now.

Their curiosity was no longer just professional-it was personal.

I had become more than a candidate in their eyes.

I was a puzzle they needed to solve, a potential they couldn’t afford to overlook.

But how much more could I reveal?

And how much could I afford to keep hidden?

Clinton's composure remained intact, but deep inside, he was startled.

As he examined the red skeleton further, he realized that the bone-strengthening method Zack mentioned was far from ordinary.

The runes etched across Zack's bones seemed to pulse with an ancient power, a forgotten energy that carried the weight of ages.

Clinton could feel it-the breath of something far older than anything in the modern cultivation world.

It was as though the skeleton resonated with the echoes of a long-lost era, and that realization sent a wave of awe through him.

Sally, sitting beside him, was thinking along similar lines.

Though Zack's words seemed almost casual, she knew better.

She didn't doubt what he said, not for a moment.

This world was ancient, spanning countless eras, each with its own cultivation techniques, secrets, and hidden knowledge.

It wasn't uncommon for forgotten methods to resurface, especially ones tied to something as powerful as the blood element.

Still, she was quietly astounded by how much potential lay before them.

As I sat there, watching their silent contemplation, I had no idea what thoughts were running through their minds.

They hadn't spoken for several moments, their expressions contemplative, perhaps even intrigued.

But inwardly, I felt a small wave of relief wash over me.

Their probing gazes, sharp as they were, had failed to uncover my greatest secret: the ancient blood drop hidden deep within my body.