

Destiny 1331

Chapter 1331: Thousand Arms Demon Asura (Part 5)

.....

Desires – these were the only drawbacks that the Demonic Practitioners were facing. It was also their weakness in a sense since suppressing these desires required much stronger willpower and perseverance.

Desire for destruction, desire to become stronger, desire to consume others, desire for revenge, and many others. These were the desires that usually the demonic practitioners faced whenever they were training their respective methods. They were commonly called the inner demons for some people, who were trying to consume an individual.

Once consumed, the said individual would turn into a mindless monster that knew nothing but to follow its desire, their instincts. But if they managed to overcome these inner demons, then they would become enlightened and reach a height that never seen before.

Some people chose to embrace their inner demons while others were so strong that they could crush any kind of demons in their hearts. These individuals became so strong that they stood at the peak of everything.

These individuals were called 'Demons' in the modern era.

The Demonic Cultivation was one of the oldest paths of the current era along with the Martial Sects and Buddhist Temples.

They were not welcomed at first due to the history that they had. But as time went by, and these Demons showed that they could suppress their desires and could live without causing any immoral acts, the people became more open-minded and welcomed them, especially when a certain war required everyone to unify and work together.

Naturally, there were still some people, who were unable to fight back their desires. They continued to follow a path that only followed their desires and committed sins and immoral acts.

These people were branded as Evil Practitioners, a group of people who were completely different from the Demonic Practitioners.

However, due to their similarities in their practices, most people confused the two and put them together. This was the reason why some of the earlier and strongest Demonic Practitioners set up some rules. They had to follow it, and if anyone broke any of these rules, they would be branded as Evil Practitioners and would be executed on the spot.

At the same time, there were some unspoken rules that the 'Demons' had tacitly agreed upon.

They were forbidden to consume other Demons, or more likely the desire of the others. It was because once it happened, a disaster would happen, especially if one of the sides were not strong enough to suppress the new desire after consuming the others.

Due to this, the strong Demons usually avoid contact with each other, especially when their instincts, particularly their 'hunger' and desire to 'consume' the others, take over whenever they mean one another.

Both Old Ryong and Jan Mateo were strong enough to suppress their desires and control their emotions. However, due to the respective goals that the two had, they could not avoid facing each other.

Old Ryong felt something odd from the Demonic Practitioner in front of him. He called it the 'scent' of the Evil. It was something that he could sense from the others once they deviated from the path of Demonic Practitioners and slowly walked toward the path of evil.

From his perspective, Jan Mateo was a Demonic Practitioner, who was a sliver away from being an Evil Practitioner. Even though the latter was able to suppress his desires quite well, Old Ryong could not risk letting this person on loose when he finally found a suitable disciple to train.

He did not want any trouble around Shin, especially when he was aware of the secrets hidden within the young man's body. From what he could tell, this person in front of him could be a serious threat to Shin once he discovered the 'seeds' in the heart of his disciple.

On the other hand, Jan Mateo did not want to give up at this moment since the person in the reports that he had received would help him reach the pinnacle of his path. Once he consumed this specific nutrient, a new path would open itself and lead to the throne that he deeply desired.

He could not retreat right now, especially when he was already close to reaching his goal.

If this old man tried to stop him, then he would dispose of him and even consume their demon, making it his own. He was not like the old-timers in the Demonic Cult or a Demonic Practitioner, who followed those old rules.

If he had to become an Evil Practitioner to reach his goal, he would be more willing to embrace it just like how he accepted his inner demon with open arms.

"You are now asking for it, old man," said Jan Mateo as his eyes started to glow with a purple light.

Seeing that Old Ryong, who was still maintaining his stabbing posture with his sword, smirked as his eyes also glowed with a similar light.

Swoosh! Swoosh!

At the same time, there seemed to be a dome that suddenly enveloped the place within hundreds of meters around the two.

Everything within this dome seemed to be no different from what the place was, but it was an alternative reality that was created through the powers of these two demons. They simultaneously released their respective domains to isolate this place from the real world and prevent others from sensing their battle for a short period that they would be fighting each other.

The world seemed to become too dark within that invisible dome despite the sun hanging high up in the sky outside it, yet the two demonic practitioners did not mind as their eyes were more than capable of seeing through the dark.

Within the dome, Old Ryong and Jan Mateo were standing in the air opposite to each other. Their Demonic Qi were currently covering their bodies as they hovered and stared at each other.

"I don't remember seeing an old demon like you listed in the record. I wonder where an old fossil like you comes from," said Jan Mateo as he observed the old man.

Old Ryong squinted his eyes as he did the same. He was in seclusion for a very long time, so he was not aware of the events that happened during his disappearance. He rarely appeared in the time of his presence either since he only joined the war in the Dark Continent and stayed there.

What happened after his retirement was none of his concern, which was why he was unaware of the recent events that were currently shaking the world.

But one thing was for sure. This Demonic Practitioner in front of him was one of the main actors or a major player of the current time.

"Where do you belong, brat? The New Demonic Cult? The Dark Hall? Or are you just a lone wolf?" said Old Ryong as he infused his sword with his powers.

"Don't put me on the same level as those trash. I am superior to everyone," said Jan Mateo sneeringly.

"So, you are one of those types," commented the old man as his tone grew more solemn. "Then it is more than a reason that I can't let you stay here."

"Your scent is too bad that I can't even puke," he added as he stroked his sword in the air in a casual manner.

It might look ordinary from the others of the other people, but Jan Mateo, who was on the receiving end of that stroke, felt and saw something completely different.

The movements of the old man were so slow that it could not even call an attack, but when Jan Mateo saw those movements, he knew that it was already too late to move or dodge.

A very thin line was drawn in the air as if something cut the air and the space in a horizontal line. This line was so thin that even a thread or a string was more noticeable than it was in a distance.

The shadow wrapped themselves around Jan Mateo as the unseen attack reached him. He felt a sharp thing cutting through his shadow powers as the thin line reached him. If not for the shadows protecting his body, then he could already see himself being cut in halves.

But that was only the start as Old Ryong started swinging the sword multiple times, turning his arm into a blur. It also created a series of flashes that drew several intertwining lines in the air.

Swoosh! Swoosh! Swoosh!

The shining lines seemed to have created a net in the air, surrounding Jan Mateo from all directions. There was no path of retreat that he could use.

Jan Mateo expanded his senses as he glanced over the attacks that were coming his way. There was no arrogance present in his eyes as he could already tell that this old man in front of him was at least on par with the old monsters that he was wary of.

If he was not mistaken, this old man was of the same generation as the council elders within the Soaring Continent. Even though he had yet to figure out the real identity of Old Ryong, he could already take this battle a little seriously.

He then slowly raised his hand and pointed his palm forward, seemingly commanding something.

Swoosh! Swoosh!

Then, suddenly, the air moved according to his will along with the appearance of Mental Energy which had a deep grey color. It formed a spherical barrier that protected Jan Mateo from the sword flashes that were coming at him from different angles.

Clang! Clang! Clang! Clang!

Metallic sounds could be heard as those flashes clashed against the transparent barrier.

At the same time, Old Ryong also saw the purple Demonic Qi shrouding his opponent before forming a huge spear that pointed toward his direction.

Jan Mateo pointed at the old man, commanding the purple spear.

Swoosh!

The spear flew straight to Old Ryong in a moment that seemed to be able to drag everything in its path. It had a crushing force that resembled a meteor as a series of shockwaves erupted as it traveled through the air.

Old Ryong stared at the incoming spear for a moment, seemingly observing it, before suddenly swinging his swords upwards.

Shing!

The simple swing seemed to have separated heaven as it an illusion of the sky being split apart could be seen within the alternate reality of the invisible dome.

Along with it, the purple spear that was made from the dense Demonic Qi was split into multiple fragments before dissipating in the air.

Old Ryong did not immediately attack after it. Instead, he stared at his opponent as he remembered something. "Now, I can remember."

"There is this young demon when I am still active on the battlefield. He is so greedy that he wants to become the strongest among everyone else and even crazy enough to accept his inner demon in pursuit of power."

"He then evolved into an entirely new being that can wield both Martial Arts and Mentalism, combining them to create that legendary form of energy."

He then squinted his eyes and got a closer look at Jan Mateo while continuing. "Although I can see that you still have yet to fully achieve it, I must say that I don't expect you to grow like this."

"But this also has given me more reason to chase you away. I can't let a Demon of your level roam on this land, especially at a time like this. You are too dangerous to stay close to 'it'," he added as he got ready to unleash his true power.

Boom!

Right after he released his true powers, even the invisible dome seemed to tremble as it was showing some signs of being unable to withstand his aura.

Behind him, there was a giant appearance of an Asura that had a thousand arms with different kinds of weapons in its hands. It was towering over everything, standing at a height that surpassed even the clouds.

Unlike the other Domain Realm Experts, Old Ryong did not develop his domain. Instead, he chose to pour everything he had into nurturing his Battle Spirit and made it comparable to the Domains of the old monsters of the same generation, if not stronger.

It was also at that moment when Jan Mateo realized which old expert of the past he was currently facing. "No wonder I don't know anything about you. It turns out that I am facing an old ghost of the past."

"Now, should I say that this is worth all the trouble? I wonder if you can also be my nourishment before facing that man again."

Chapter 1332: Cause and Effect

...

In the outskirts of the Eastern Sea Region, the invisible dome finally disappeared and revealed a lone figure standing in the sky.

Old Ryong was currently standing in the air with his sheathed sword in hand. His other hand was currently pressing on his right chest, where his heart was supposed to be present.

There was a huge hole in that part of his chest. Something seemed to pierce through him and come out of his back. If it was any other person, then they would surely be on the brink of death, if they were not dead already.

Fortunately, Old Ryong was not an ordinary person, but a Demonic Practitioner instead, and a powerful demon at that. He would still live as long as his core remained intact.

His regenerative abilities were so powerful that any grave injuries for other people would be nothing to him as they would regenerate fast and heal within almost an instant. But the current injuries that he had seemed to be healing much slower than it supposed to be.

The hole on his back had already healed to a certain extent, but the huge wound on his chest had yet to recover. His flesh which was trying to fix themselves was being hindered by a strange energy that came from the previous attack of his opponent.

No matter how powerful the Demonic Qi and Natural Force that Old Ryong had, it still could not remove the foreign energy that was left within his body.

Fortunately, this energy was not overwhelmingly powerful, so it would only take a week or two before he fully recovered from it.

"I guess I can't afford to underestimate these young ones," he mumbled as he looked at the injuries that he had. He suppressed it with his powers before looking at the spot where he last saw Jan Mateo. "To think that he will be able to fuse his Internal Qi and Mental Energy to this degree. He sure is one of the most talented people in this era."

"Fortunately, he has yet to reach the level of Worldly Origin, or else I will be in deep trouble," he added as he swept his gaze in the surroundings. "He even erases his tracks and hides his scent this time. I guess he has learned his lesson already."

"I should have brought enough time with this already. Let's just hope that he will not recover that fast with that kind of injury," he then turned around and disappeared, heading back to the Magic Ace Academy.

He wanted to finish off Jan Mateo, if possible, but he knew that it was far from what he hoped for given his current abilities. He might be powerful, and his techniques were a bane to some of the Demonic Practitioners, but it still had its limits.

He had to be satisfied with the current result since it could not be helped.

...

In another place of the Eastern Sea Region, where a sea of trees filled a valley.

Jan Mateo stepped out of a dimensional rift that he had created. He quickly sat on the ground and leaned on the nearby tree.

He immediately entered a meditation state to focus his mind. He was focusing on healing the injuries that he just received from the earlier battle.

There was a huge wound across his torso, which was releasing a dark purple aura. The wound started from his left shoulder and reached the right side of his waist. This would cut too deep. If not for his powerful regenerative abilities as a Demonic Practitioner and healing techniques as a Mentalist, then his body would most likely be severed already.

He tried his best to heal the wound, but the energy that Old Ryong was stubbornly sticking to it, prevented him from fully healing himself.

Based on his observation, it would take him at least a whole month before he completely removed the energy and fully recovered his peak form.

He was planning to stay in this continent for a month anyway, so work well. But being seriously injured like this was not part of the plan. This could hinder his plans and forget about the few things that he was planning to do.

"Tsk! I have underestimated that old man. He sure lives up to his reputation as the Demon Asura. He sure is a bane of us Demons due to that powerful Demonic Energy that can eradicate ours. If not for the partial fusion of my Demonic Qi and Mental Energy, then I would be in deeper trouble," he mumbled before looking at the dark purple energy stuck in his wounds.

"But this can also work in my favor. I can spend some of my extra time to study his Natural Force while removing it."

"I may not be able to copy it, but I can at least learn a thing or two while studying it," he mumbled as he felt fortunate to the innate properties of his Demonic Qi.

It was already late in the afternoon when Shin finally snapped out of his trance. He was too focused on the training and got himself too immersed in studying the different 'heaviness' of the variety of weapons in the pile in front of him.

He was stopping from time to time since he felt inspired after swinging a certain weapon a thousand times. He would then sit in front of the wooden table and collect his thoughts, putting everything that he had learned together.

After a few minutes in a meditative state, Shin then picked up the brush and focused his energy and will on its tip in every stroke that he made when writing the word 'heavy.'

But despite knowing the logic behind this practice and understanding the feeling that he needed to write the word, he seemed to be unable to write the way he intended.

He seemed to be missing the right 'state' and 'feeling' for it. It was as if he could not transfer his thoughts to the brush and the paper, unable to completely convey the feeling that he wanted to express through his calligraphy.

But he was not that disappointed. It was because he was surprisingly able to understand some of the properties of his innate attributes and saw them from a different angle, giving him a new perspective.

Just like how he saw the heaviness of the earth element, the metal element also possessed a similar property of heaviness, but also somewhat different. Even the fire element had its own property of heaviness that he had never noticed before.

When he discovered this, Shin seemed to have become addicted to training and continued to swing the weapons before trying to project everything that he had learned into his calligraphy. He continued with this cycle until was finally his time to stop and head over to the energy room, where he was supposed to continue his studies in his innate attributes.

He could forget about the other training routine that he usually had due to what Professor Henry had told him, but he could not skip this one since he still had to awaken all his innate attributes as soon as possible if he wanted to force his Spiritual Force.

He would only need to spend two hours at most in the energy training chambers anyway before calling it a day.

Professor Henry always emphasized the balance between work and rest, so he could not push himself that hard when the professor himself was telling him to take it easy.

Clank! Clank!

After walking out of the energy training chambers, Shin was immediately greeted by Benedict, who was currently waiting for him outside.

"Do you have something to ask me, Senior?" asked Shin as he could tell that this senior wanted to talk to him.

Seeing that Shin finally walked out, Benedict quickly rushed toward his side and asked. "Junior, you are playing in the main servers, am I right? Then are you one of the leading players, who are actively opening the new contents of the game?"

Shin was confused by that question before thinking to himself. If Benedict was asking if he was one of the players, who took part in the missions that concerned the main quest scenarios, which were connected to the game updates, then he could consider himself as a leading player.

Thinking about this, Shin slowly nodded his head with continued to stare at his senior with a confused gaze.

"Then have you received any notification about portal opening or something?" asked Benedict in a careful tone.

Shin did not immediately reply as he frowned deeply. He then pursed his lips before answering. "I am not sure if it is what you are talking about, but I do receive some notifications about portals in a couple of notifications that I have received from the system."

"But none of them tell me about their opening directly. Just some clues or things like that," he added as was trying to recall the previous notifications that he had gotten from the quests that he had.

In the meantime, Benedict seemed to have become a little excited and pointed to Shin repeatedly. "That is more than enough! That is more than enough!"

Shin became even more confused by that reaction, but a sudden idea entered his mind. "Don't tell me... Are the private servers and main servers about to merge?"

"Ah! No... no... that's not exactly it. But it is already a sign," said Benedict as he was shaking his head. He then thought for a moment before adding. "One of my friends inside the game is from a different dimension and their race is somewhat related to demons."

"It seems like the Demon Race is making sudden movements as their armies seem to be preparing for something, most likely a big event. This can be the start of what we are waiting for," said Benedict as he could not hide his excitement.

But after a few moments, a dejected look seemed to overwhelm as he continued. "But it will still take some time before it happens. I want to join the upcoming United Cup, if possible, but it seems like we will not be able to make it."

"United Cup? The tournament meant for Adventurer Teams and the elite teams from different guilds and organizations?" asked Shin, slightly caught off guard.

"Yeah," answered Benedict simply.

"Why? And who are you going with?" asked Shin again.

"What do you mean why? How can we miss such a big event? It is the best opportunity to test our battle capabilities," answered Benedict before quickly adding. "And of course, I am going with the rest of the Department – all of the Sleeping Dragons."

"I also heard that the other elite clubs of the academy are joining. They also have their members that are playing the private servers."

"There are also the Top Military School. Ah! I am sure that the other prestigious schools around the world will be sending their representative if only it is possible. They also have their people in the private servers, you know."

"Tsk! Alas, it is not happening."

As Benedict listed out all the other groups that might join the United Cup if not for the current restrictions for the private servers, Shin could not help but feel a shiver down his spine.

He knew how strong his seniors were in the Sleeping Dragons. He experienced their powers first-hand and suffered a beating from each of them.

"Should I ask for a merger with Brother Jerimiah and Brother Vincent? Should I invite Senior Brother to join us as well?" mumbled Shin as he thought of the other powerful groups that are the top schools that are comparable to the Magic Ace Academy and Top Military School from every corner of the world.

Fortunately, they were currently being restricted by the game through separate servers, or else he could not imagine how chaotic the game would be and how intense the competition between different powers would become.

Benedict seemed to read what was running inside Shin's head. "You don't have much to worry about. Given the current circumstances, the movements in the Underworld are just one of the requirements to meet for the servers to merge."

"There are also the Spirit Realm, the Nether Realm, the Immortal Realm, and many others. All the conditions must be met before those portals that connect them to the main world will appear. It is still far from what you are thinking."

Shin caught on the realms that would possibly be the so-called private servers. "There are that many?"

"Many? It is a lot. But we have this private server webpage where we can share the news about each realm. However, only players in the private servers can gain access to them," said Benedict.

"This is not that of a secret since you can get some information about these realms in the royal or imperial libraries of the main server. But you can't casually spread this information since it can get me in trouble if it spreads too wide," warned Benedict as he was somewhat blaming himself for not controlling his mouth.

After that, he patted Shin's shoulders before saying. "Anyway, I must thank you for the news. We first thought that we have to wait until the higher planes to open before we, from the private servers, can join the main server."

"We at least now have some hope in joining earlier before the game anniversary arrives," he laughed before turning around and walking away.

Shin, on the other hand, caught on to another piece of information after hearing those words. "Higher planes? There is more than one higher plane?"

"And the game anniversary? Something big must be happening at that time."

Chapter 1333: Cause and Effect (Part 2)

.....

When Shin got back to his room, he immediately took a quick shower before heading to his gaming cabin. He logged in to get an update on the current situation.

He did not want to bother about the state of the Sacred Light Kingdom since it did not concern him much. After all, the mission was initially for Owen and Ithilien, and the rest only helped for their respective benefits.

As for the side about the HeadHunter Guild, he passed it to the experts of the Hand of Midas. It was their expertise, so he could leave it to them, especially when they were dealing with the matters with the Titan Guild anyway.

He could leave it to them while he dealt with his own business.

He then opened his system logs to read the previous notifications that he just received.

System: Congratulations on successfully defeating the Grand Centipedeus (Larva)! You and your affiliates will gain a massive boost of fame and reputation points.

System: The connection between this plane and the Underworld has weakened. But since the dimensional gate connecting the two worlds is already in the process of opening, you can no longer stop the arrival of the Lord of the Flies.

System: The avatar of the Lord of the Flies, the Glutton Demon King Beelzebub, has already been selected.

System: A certain existence interferes with the connection of the Demon King and this plane. The opening of the Dimensional Portal has slightly been affected and extended.

System: Estimated Time for the Portal Opening:

Arrival of the main army: 299 days, 19 hours, 12 seconds. (In-game Time)

Arrival of the vanguard army of the Bug Tribe: 87 days, 12 hours. (In-game Time)

...

Shin did not know how long exactly the original timeframe was until this invasion occurred, but it seemed like they still had more than enough time to prepare themselves.

Based on the information that he had gotten from Solus previously, it seemed like the Bug Tribe possessed an army that could sweep through the entire Aurora Continent, especially when they had powerful demonic beings in their ranks.

But given this time, he was confident that they would have more than enough time to level up and familiarize themselves with their current tiers.

From his estimate, the vanguard army of the Bug Tribe should have a lot of monsters that underwent their third mutation or evolution, which were equivalent to the third tier of the respective classes of the players.

After reading through these notifications, Shin proceeded to read the rest.

This time, it was meant for their team since Owen and Ithilien were the main initiators of the quests. The Hand of Midas also benefited from them since they were a closely affiliated Guild of their adventurer team.

System: Empyrean Talons has been directly promoted to an A-Class Adventurer Team. Quest acquisition and team promotions in the Adventurer Guild will increase greatly.

System: The Affiliated Guild, Hand of Midas Trading Firm, will benefit from this event. Their fame and reputation will spread throughout the entire Aurora Continent.

System: Hand of Midas Trading Firm has become an Empire-Class Trading Firm!

...

Shin was not aware of the classes among the lifestyle guilds and trading firms since it was not his major field. He specialized in exploration and battles, which fell among the Combat Guilds like the rest that he had faced.

But given that the words 'Empire-Class Trading Firm' sounded quite good, he guessed that it was something that his big sister would love.

He even had gotten a message from Shiella regarding this matter.

Snow White: My dear little brother, you sure are my lucky charm! Keep up the good work and let this big sister handle the rest.

Shin shivered intensely when he read that message. The hair on his body stood erect, giving him serious goosebumps. He would rather Shiella give him an intense scolding or let her curse him than hear such words from her.

He felt nauseous reading the content of her message while suppressing himself from vomiting.

He did not want to dwell on this matter as he quickly proceeded to read the next series of notifications.

System: Congratulations on clearing the Elemental Spirit Promotion Quest!

System: Your Reaper's Retainers, Blackie and Whitie, have successfully become Monarch Elementals!

...

Those were just simple messages, but their contents left Shin satisfied. He read the notifications a few more times before opening the panel meant for his Elemental Spirit Companions.

Just like Solus, Hanzo, and Astaroth, the two newly promoted Elemental Spirits now had special borders of their own. Their name cards and the background they had were now designed with special properties of their respective elements.

Spirit Name: Blackie

Status: Reaper's Retainer – Darkness

Race: Special Elemental Spirit

Bloodline: Abysmal Penumbra Spirit

Purity: Monarch

Transformation: Abysmal Monarch

Ability Status: Temporarily Sealed

Tier: Current 3 (Potential 5)

Level (Sealed): Adjusted to 170 (Max 500)

Spirit Name: Whitie

Status: Reaper's Retainer – Light

Race: Special Elemental Spirit

Bloodline: Sacred Radiant Spirit

Purity: Monarch

Transformation: Sacred Ruler

Ability Status: Temporarily Sealed

Tier: Current 3 (Potential 5)

Level (Sealed): Adjusted to 170 (Max 500)

Blackie, who was in her special transformation, looked both scary and seductive at the same time. The pair of bat wings on her back and the scorpion tail at the back of her waist caught his attention immediately.

She was looking at him in a model-like posture while licking her sharp claws.

The background and the border of her name card were shrouded in black Mana, representing the dark element. They moved slowly and flowed rhythmically while the dark tendrils at the edges of the border gave off the feeling that they were alive.

Whitie, on the other hand, stood imposingly and majestically with his arms crossed in front of him. His robe which resembled the one that the kings used to wear in ancient times fluttered as a golden halo hovered right above the crown over his head.

The golden design of the name card seemed to be releasing a constant pulse of sacred light as its borders shone in brilliance.

The contrast between the two name cards was easy to notice. But when they were placed side by side, they seemed to be giving a certain sense of balance and harmony.

Shin then placed all the special name cards of his Elemental Spirits and appreciated their respective beauty before nodding his head, fully satisfied.

He was only left with Vladimir and Grimrace now. But given that they were already in the middle of their respective evolution, he knew that it would not take that long before their name cards also transformed.

Vladimir was still digesting all the inheritances that Dracula had left for him, even though Shin was somewhat unaware of it. This Blood Prince would also change his name card once he was done with it.

Grimrace, on the other hand, would naturally evolve as long as he devoured more elemental spirits or abomination spirits. All Shin needed was to find a suitable target that he could give to this Abomination.

Shin thought that this was where the notification would end, but he was wrong, as he noticed that there was a final notification that he barely noticed at the end.

When he read through all the system notifications, he saw a somewhat strange notification that did not seem to belong to the rest.

System: You have found a clue related to your quest 'The Ancient Powers'.

Quest Update: Investigate more about the Bug Tribe and the Lord of the Flies, the Glutton Demon King Beelzebub.

Added Conditions: Find an opportunity to head to the Underworld and learn more about the Devil Ancestor.

System: This quest is a special prolonged quest. This quest does not have any time limit.

...

Reading those notifications, Shin felt that it was rather interesting. He almost forgot about this quest since Solus had asked him to delay investigating the Ancient God Book in his possession.

Solus said that the Gods and Goddesses in the Higher Plane would instantly notice its existence once he used it, which would make him a big target for everyone.

He felt that he needed to reach the fifth tier at least and became a Sovereign Being before he could continue investigating this quest. But it looked like the system was telling him that he could get more clues about it in the Underworld.

Unfortunately, he did not know much about that place, much less finding a way to head over there.

He could guess that it was somewhat related to the portal that was about to open and the next major content that was about to be released, but that still needed to wait until it happened.

Regardless, he was grateful since he at least knew what to do next with this particular quest later. "I guess things keep on piling up."

He mumbled as he organized himself and thought about the things that he needed to do.

But at that moment, he received a few messages from a few people. The first ones were from Ithilien.

Ithilien: Vice Commander, you are finally online!

Ithilien: Can you come to the Maze Forest for a moment? The Elven Seer wants to talk to you. It seems like he wants to take you for helping us.

Ithilien: He says that he wants to reward you or something like that.

Shin raised his brow for a moment sending a reply casually.

Sickarius: I'll be there in a minute.

He then paused and proceeded to look at the rest of the messages.

Snow White: My dear little brother, come and visit the city when you are free. I am done with everything and talk to the people that you have sent. We can now open it to the public if you want.

Snow White: But I suggest waiting until we fully establish the port where we are going to relocate the Calderock Town before its promotion to a Basic City.

Snow White: However, we will have some problems since the wall of ice is about to fully melt, making the Frozen Kingdom open to the world.

Shin thought for a moment before replying.

Sickarius: Do we have any way to hasten the construction of the Port City? I can send more funds if you need them.

The reply came almost instantly.

Snow White: Tsk! Tsk! You sound like a tycoon right now, don't you think? Money is not the problem. That is something that I will not lack inside the game.

Snow White: There is a way to solve our problems, but I need you to deal with a couple of things. Tell me when you are free. I have some job for you.

Snow White: But I suggest you free some of your time and head over here as soon as possible so that we can finish this already. I still have to clear my class promotion quest, if you are not aware.

Shin chuckled when he saw those messages since he preferred this rather than getting those sweet messages that gave him goosebumps and cringes.

After making sure that he did not forget anything, Shin quickly took out a return scroll and instantly crushed it.

...

Not long after, he arrived at the Maze Forest once again.

But this time, he could not help but sweep his gaze in the surroundings since he felt that he arrived at the wrong place.

The entrance of the Maze Forest was still filled with people. But instead of the battle-ready formation that he had arranged previously, it was not filled with players lining up to get inside.

There were also some high-level NPCs guarding the entrance, seemingly checking everyone, who was trying to get inside.

"I wonder what happened to the spies that the elves have. I hope Adept Hands and Tinker deal with them properly," he mumbled as he walked toward the Maze Forest.

He did not want to line up with the rest, so he asked Ithilien to send someone that fetch him outside. He was one of the main contributors, who saved the kingdom, so he should at least have this kind of privilege.

When he entered the forest, he could not help but think once again if he was indeed in the right place. This region seemed to have transformed from a resource map to a huge forest city.

He felt that he had been away from the place for decades due to the scattered people, both NPCs and Players, walking around. There were also some established houses in the trees and up their branches, giving out an ancient and tribal atmosphere due to their primitive designs.

The whole map had completely transformed in such a short time that he got offline.

"It looks like an elven city, alright," commented Shin as he followed the guide leading the way.

When he arrived at the center of the Maze Forest, where the altar used to be located and became their temporary base, he could not help but open his eyes in amazement.

He found a majestic tree at the center of a huge pond. The primitive yet exquisite houses that the elves had built surrounded the pond as the people gave their regards and worshiped the tree at the center.

He could also see some elves giving offerings, which transformed into specks of light for some unknown reason. These lights filled the air, illuminating the whole place.

There was a long wooden bridge connecting the land beneath the World Tree and the land surrounding the pond. Its entrance was being guarded by a group of elven knights, who lined up at the edge of the bridge.

From what Shin could see, these elven knights were mighty, and could not be faced by any player in the current stage of the game.

He appreciated the view for a few more moments before following the guide once again. Right now, he was quite curious about what happened with the current council of elves, who would be leading this kingdom.

Chapter 1334: Cause and Effect (Part 3)

...

The moment when Shin crossed the wooden bridge connecting the center island, where the world tree was located, and the surrounding land of the Maze Forest, he was immediately greeted by an amazing sight of a majestic house that seemed to fuse with the tree.

He stared blankly at it for a couple of moments before following the guide inside. Then, when he entered, what he saw was something completely unexpected. He must admit that he guessed it wrong. It was a massive castle instead of an elven house.

The interior was so big that it was much bigger than the castle that he infiltrated previously along with Diablo. He was wondering how these elves had built such a big and complicated structure within such a short period. There was even a city outside this place almost filling the entire Maze Forest.

It seemed like the city and this tree castle were constructed within an instant. If only building a player city was this easy, then he and Shiella would not have any problems right now.

Shin was busily looking around as the guide led him to a place that looked like a throne room. But the strange thing was there was no one sitting on the throne despite it being situated at the very end of the room and elevated by a platform.

There was a circle of seats around the room, on a platform elevated from the ground. There were also empty seats, but Shin could guess that they were meant for the elders of the elven race.

However, there was no one present in the throne room, which gave Shin an idea of what was going on.

As Shin walked through the aisle of the room, he reached the other end, right below the platform of the throne.

He saw that Ithilien and Owen were currently waiting for him there along with an elderly elf. This elder had a hunchback and seemed to be very old. His body was being supported by a wooden cane that helped him to stand.

The age of this elder elf was exposed by the wrinkles on the corner of his eyes and his forehead. The blond hair that now had a hint of grey was also telling Shin that this elder must have lived for quite a long time.

Shin already knew that this elder must be the Elven Seer that the two were talking about. He was also the one who insisted on summoning Shin to personally thank him for his help.

As Shin observed the elder, the latter was also giving him a scrutinizing gaze. It was as if anything in front of the eyes of this elder would reveal their true selves without being able to hide any of their secrets.

Shin felt rather uncomfortable with that gaze, especially when this gaze was trying to unveil everything about himself.

The elder, on the other hand, seemed to have seen something and nodded his head satisfactorily, especially when he saw the specks of lights revolving around Shin.

He did not care about the mask that Shin was wearing, which indicated that he was an envoy of the Church of the Sun and the Moon. Even though the elves and that church had a close relationship, the Elven Seer was a firm believer in the 'Mother Tree' and the 'Moon Goddess' alone, so they did not worship any other gods aside from these two.

Regardless, the Elven Seer seemed to find Shin interesting as he saw that there were quite a few Elementals that were very close to him.

He knew that Transcendent Beings had a certain relationship with the Elementals due to the war that occurred during the Repelling Era, but he could see that the relationship between Shin and these Elemental Spirits was quite special. They had a certain bond that should only be present between the elves and the elementals.

"To think that he is this close with the elements, he truly is a special individual," commented the Elven Seer, surprising Ithilien and Owen, who were standing near him.

These two had interacted with this elder the most due to the events that happened. It could be said that they had a quite close relationship with him. But this was their first time hearing him praise someone.

The moment Shin stood in front of them, he quickly gave the elder a respectful bow before saluting with a unique gesture of the Church of the Sun and Moon.

The Elven Seer chuckled when he saw his actions and waved his hand. "There is no need to be this formal, young envoy. You are one of the saviors of our kingdom, so I should be the one saluting to you."

The elder seemed to have no plans of beating around the bush as he quickly stated his purpose in summoning Shin. "I want to offer you an invitation to a festival since it is usually the custom of our race whenever we are saved from a great disaster."

"But as you can see, the kingdom still hasn't fully recovered from the damage of the Withering. It is very inappropriate for such a festive activity right now, so I must ask for your forgiveness."

"And I can tell that you are quite a busy young man, so I will be straightforward with you. I want to grant you a special request as a reward for your assistance. I will give you anything as long as we have it and will not affect our race."

"I can also do anything for you as long as it is within my powers," he added while giving Shin a deep bow.

Shin was slightly taken aback by the actions of the old elf. He was about to refuse as a form of courtesy, especially when he was only helping his friends with their quest.

But on second thought, it must be a special reward from the system, so it would be a pity if he refused such a tempting offer.

"You must not refuse, young hero. This will not only be a symbol of gratitude from our race and kingdom, but it will also reflect the favor of our Goddess and the Mother Tree," added the elder before Shin could even refuse.

Shin was now caught in a dilemma as he did not know how to respond. He turned to Ithilien and Owen to the side, asking for their opinion, but the two just shrugged their shoulders as they also did not know what to do.

Shin then tried to think what he currently needed, until he thought of something. He then opened his inventory and took out a core that he acquired just recently.

"Then, can you help me with this?" he asked carefully as he also did not know what to do with this thing.

It was the core that he had gotten from King Yulis after he defeated the humanoid monster recently. It was said to be a material that could be used for the formation of a 'Sword Heart', so Shin wondered if the elder could help him with this.

After all, the Sacred Light Kingdom was supposedly the capital of the Apothecary Profession, so he wondered if this Elven Seer had the solution to this problem.

When the Elven Seer raised his head and saw the small globe on Shin's hand, his eyes suddenly turned wide as a blank look overwhelmed his face. "This... This is..."

That was when Shin realized something. This core was something that he had gotten from King Yulis, the previous king of this kingdom, so it was not hard to imagine the reaction of the loyal subject of the king once they saw this core.

The Elven Seer might not know where Shin had gotten this core, but given his abilities, he could at least see through the secrets of this object and discover the 'soul' of their previous king inside it.

This 'soul' might not be their king, but it still had his fragments and was closely related to him.

Shin realized his mistake. He was about to keep the core back when the elder was finally able to recover himself.

The Elven Seer sighed with deep regret along with a painful expression. "Don't worry, young envoy. It is not your fault. You must have extracted this core and the tinder within it after you defeated the puppet, who previously was our king."

"I must say that this can be fate as it now falls in your hands," he added with a lonely smile. "But I rather let you have it than let those people get their hands on it."

He then looked at Shin and nodded his head. "I think I know what you want to do with it. But are you sure that this will be your request? I think it will not be enough."

Shin thought for a moment before shaking his head. He knew that he shouldn't be too greedy, especially if he wanted to build relationships between this special NPC.

He nodded his head and confirmed that it would be his request. "Please, help me with this."

The Elven Seer stared at Shin for a few moments before nodding his head. "Then I will do my best to help you produce the best result as possible."

"But this will take some time, so I suggest you come back and see me after a day or two. I need to prepare a few things and seek help from a few people," he said and gave a token to Shin. "You can show this to the guards of this place, and they will do their best to help you. They will respect you as much as they respect me, so make sure to hold onto it and not lose it."

"If you can, please don't leave the kingdom during this time since I may be able to collect the materials needed and summon everyone people that can help with this."

When the Elven Seer saw Shin nod his head, he smiled before taking the core with him and left the throne room.

In the meantime, Ithilien and Owen walked over to Shin before giving their reports about the events that occurred during his time out of the game.

After listening for a few moments, he suddenly remembered something and asked. "What about Samael and Huahua? Where are they?"

"Ah! Those two? They seem to enjoy the current atmosphere of the Maze Forest. They accept a few tasks available from every NPC within the city and start running around," said Ithilien before asking. "Should I call them? I think they will be thrilled to see you since they are quite eager to join the team."

"Especially that litter girl. She keeps on bothering me about it. She seems to be excited to join us," she added while giggling. She seemed to be quite fond of the Huahua given her reaction.

Shin thought for a moment before saying. "I am planning to invite Samael. But I have to ask for the opinions of the other members. We can discuss it when we have time. Their situation is quite different from Diablo."

"How about the traitors? What happened to them and how do you deal with those people?" he asked.

"Ah! Regarding that. The Elven Seer seems to be aware of them. He-..."

Real World

Soaring Continent, Central Region.

David, along with Jerimiah and Vincent, stood in front of a certain temple that seemed to be abandoned for a very long time.

"Where are you taking us now, David? We just come back from that unreasonably hard mission that you have suggested to the academy, now you want us to explore such a haunted place?" complained Jerimiah.

Vincent, on the other hand, did not say anything. It was because, despite the difficulty of the mission that they just finished, the benefits that they had gotten from it were rather good.

Even his stagnant growth seemed to start flowing once again.

"Tell us, David. What do you want to achieve by dragging us to these places?" asked Vincent.

Jerimiah nodded his head as he agreed. "That is right! Do you know how much progress the game is making? We are already left behind by the rest. I heard that the other top dogs are starting to reach Tier 3 now."

David ignored Jerimiah and looked at Vincent. He stared at the latter for a couple of seconds before sighing helplessly. "I am not sure either. My master's husband left these missions to me to deal with before he left with his wife and went 'sightseeing'."

Stopping his joke there, David shrugged his shoulders and continued. "I may not know the reason behind it, but I can at least trust him on whatever it is."

"He may look carefree and lazy at times, but everything he does has a certain meaning behind them. I've gotten used to it already and just leave it to fate," he added, earning him an odd look from the two.

David waved his hand. "Whatever! I just know that he must want me to look for something. I don't know what exactly it is, but I am sure that I will be able to recognize it once I see it."

"I assure you that we are doing a good deed, so just trust me and help with this. We can go back once everything is over."

The two watched David enter the abandoned temple and were not sure what to do. They felt that this guy was pretty much unreliable at times. But they also could not deny that everywhere he went had a hidden treasure within them.

They then exchanged glances before sighing helplessly and following the lead of this crazy guy.

Inside the temple, a certain statue suddenly released eerie light from its eyes as if sensing their entry.

Chapter 1335: The Wing's Alliance

...

Real World

Soaring Continent, Eastern Sea Region.

In the port of the Corner Stone City, a military ship ducked itself, letting its passengers disembark from it.

Bang!

Right after the metal bridge connected to the dock, soldiers in uniform walked through it in a very orderly manner. They formed a pair of lines on each side of the metal bridge as the representatives, delegates, and officers walked through the aisle.

It was not rare for such a scene to take place in the Soaring Continent, especially when they were known for their military forces.

Drills and similar military practices were quite common everywhere in the Soaring Continent, so the people, who saw this scene were not bothered by it. They were treating it as a normal occurrence.

After the officials disembarked from the ship, a pair of beautiful young women walked out. They were Shiella and Alyssa, who were currently in disguise.

They immediately attracted the attention of those who saw them just by their appearances. Such a pair of heavenly beauties were bound to attract attention anywhere they went.

Behind them was another beautiful woman of an older age. It was Anna, Shiella's assistant and bodyguard.

Following behind her was a man, who was being escorted by soldiers. He had slightly decent features, but it was overshadowed by a blank and absentminded look on his face.

There were no obvious signs of physical abuse or beating on him, but it seemed like the mental damage that he had suffered was quite serious.

It was clear that he suffered mental torture during the entire trip here.

Right after her foot stepped on her homeland, Shiella felt more relaxed. She sighed before looking over her shoulder. "Auntie, you can bring the guy to Uncle Nathan. Let him deal with the rest as I want to relax a little."

She then turned to Alyssa and asked. "Do you want to come with me, or do you want to explore on your own?"

Alyssa stared at Shiella as she thought to herself. It felt like the latter was treating her a little too formal. At times, she felt a hint of unfriendliness for some unknown reason.

The quick shift in the mood confused Alyssa, making her unable to read this person.

After some thought, she chose to politely refuse the offer with a smile. "Thank you for your kind gesture, but I think there is no need to trouble yourself with me."

"I can go on my own from here. If I need something, I can just call David for some help."

"Once again, thank you for helping me this time," she bowed as she bade her farewell.

Shiella slightly nodded her head as she watched Alyssa walk away.

Behind her, Anna walked over and whispered. "Are you sure about this, young miss? Can we let her roam freely like this after the commotion that she had created in the Sun-Moon Continent?"

Shiella shook her head. "It is fine, Auntie. I think she is not that kind of person. I understand her actions there, so there is no need to be too wary of her."

"Besides, we can put the blame on David if she causes more trouble here. They have a pretty close relationship after all," she then walked away, not waiting for Anna to say anything.

Anna, on the other hand, felt something strange in the tone that Shiella had in the latter part of her words. She was not sure what it was, but she could at least tell that it was something new.

She then smiled and shook her head before signaling the soldiers behind her. "Let's go. We are going to send this trash to Commander Nathan. As for the rest, let the delegates handle them. It is their job to report to the higher-ups anyway.

Virtual World – Atlas World

Aurora Continent, Blue Crimson Empire

This empire was the place where the Wing's Alliance set up their main base of operation. Almost all the strongest members along with the elders and minor leaders of the guild were gathered in this place.

This empire had become their main turf as most of their forces and army were concentrated here. Every region and city in this place was almost under their control as they had great influence in the entire empire.

They even set up multiple strongholds and built up cities on the outskirts of the empire as they planned to spread their controlled territory toward the Neutral Maps near the empire.

It was just a pity that there was an internal conflict within the guild, making their progress slow down. If not for this, then they would most likely be one that was facing either the Hydra Guild or Central Order in the battle for the so-called first territory of the game.

The Alliance Leader of the Wing's Alliance had previously asked for some assistance from the Empyrean Talons. It was Arthur, who received it and relayed the news to Shin and the others.

The group had suspected that this was most likely one of the plots by the players from the Evil Faction, most probably either the Pandemonium Descendants once again or another hidden Superpower that was trying to accumulate more powers in the dark while also disrupting the other rivals that they had.

The Wing's Alliance was just a little unfortunate that they had been targeted by quite a lot of guilds recently.

...

Arthur was currently sitting in one of the secret bases of the Wing's Alliance. He was currently being treated as a VIP as he was a guest of the Alliance Leader, though this meeting was supposedly a secret to the other elders of the guild.

The only people, who knew that he was here were the most trusted people of the Alliance Leader.

"I must say that these guys from the Wing's Alliance are sure to love showing off their wealth," commented Arthur as he relaxed on the sofa.

Not long after, the door of the room suddenly opened followed by the entrance of someone. This person wore a black cloak with golden feathers embroidered on its edges. There were also purple lines tracing the edges of these feathers, highlighting the design.

This player was wearing a set of golden armor, hidden underneath the cloak while carrying a shield on his back and a longsword sheathed on his waist.

He was the personal guard of the Alliance Leader and the leader of the Golden Feather Squad of the Wing's Alliance, the hidden unit of the guild and their trump card.

Behind this person, was a player wearing a luxurious robe that seemed to be from ancient times. It was greatly similar to the red robe that the Eastern kings used to wear in the past. A crown was also present on the head of this player, seemingly trying to say that his status was higher than any player.

A sheathed sword was in his hand while a short scepter was in the other, signifying that his class was not an ordinary one.

Seeing their appearance, particularly the latter, Arthur could not help but stare at them with a blank look on his face before bursting out with crazy laughter. "What the heck? What are you playing right now? An ancient king of something?"

"It seems like being the current Alliance Leader of the Wing's Alliance turns you into a 'chuunibyou' or something! D*mn! I shall take more photos of you and spread them around in our circle of friends!"

This Alliance Leader sighed helplessly when he saw that reaction before walking toward Arthur and sitting across the latter.

In the meantime, the other player glared at Arthur before turning around stepping out of the room, and closing the door behind him.

"Don't get me started. This is not something that I want. This certain quest requires me to always wear this set of equipment if I want to clear it," said the Alliance Leader, trying to explain his current situation.

"And you are the last person that I want to hear those words, you dragon fanatic," he added while glaring at Arthur.

It took Arthur quite a long time before he was able to calm himself. He then tried to collect himself as he refuted. "Well, I at least don't look as ridiculous as you."

The two chatted for a couple of moments before they finally got down to business.

"So, what is your take on our current situation? Will you be able to help me with my problem?" asked the Alliance Leader while wearing a serious look on his face.

Arthur also stopped joking around when he saw that expression. He then pursed his lips a little before explaining their situation. "As you can see, we are all busy with our own things. I can't guarantee that we can provide you enough support."

He then clicked his tongue as he commented. "Tsk! This is the problem of guilds that are built from the collective interest of different groups. You guys should have not accepted such an investment in the first place. Look at the mess that you guys have gotten yourselves into."

The Alliance Leader smiled bitterly. "You should have known that I didn't have enough power at that time. I am nothing but a sharp sword of the guild at that time, who knew nothing but fight our enemies."

"A simple workshop that turns into a corporation and a hegemon within the virtual world. That sure is amazing, but turning your passion and dream into business has never been a good thing," commented Arthur as he was aware of the history of the Wing's Alliance.

The Alliance Leader turned silent for a moment while wearing a helpless expression. "It has become a family thing. It can't be help."

Arthur also sighed as he was also aware of this. He then proceeded to the main topic. "You said that the current Grand Elder of the guild is trying to take over everything. You also discovered that he is constantly making contact with outsiders of the guild."

"Have you gathered enough evidence?" he asked as he recalled the instructions that Shin had given him.

The Alliance Leader nodded at first before shaking his head. "Those evidence are no longer useful since I have also discovered that the influence of the Grand Elder has not only spread within the guild but also in the corporation in the real world."

"I want to deal with him, then I must fight him both in the virtual world and the real world. I also have to fight those outsiders, who are setting their eyes on us."

Arthur thought for a moment as he tried hard to find a solution. But he also knew that this was not his strong point, so he instantly gave up after just a few minutes. "Let's forget about this for now. What I need is to give us the exact commission that you want from us."

The Alliance Leader smiled for a moment before sending a file to Arthur through an in-game message.

Arthur did not even bother to read it as he quickly forwarded it to Shin and Cloe right after receiving it. He might be a vice commander of the adventurer team, but those two were the ones who were actually in charge of these things.

The Alliance Leader might not exactly know what Arthur did, but he at least knew that this guy did not bother to read what he sent. He knew Arthur for a long time now and knew how this guy dealt with things.

He just smiled, not minding those actions. Instead, he continued to chat with Arthur while waiting for the other side to reply.

While they were in the middle of their chat, the person guarding the door suddenly entered in a rush, seemingly in a little panic.

"Alliance Leader, we have a situation. It seems like an emergency from the headquarters," said the man as he entered.

The Alliance Leader remained calm as he seemed to expect something like this to happen during his absence.

Arthur, on the other hand, smiled as if he thought of something. "Interesting. They come at the right time as I am about to get bored."

Chapter 1336: The Wing's Alliance (Part 2)

.....

Falcon City, one of the main cities was built by the Wing's Alliance. It was currently an Advanced City and was about to be promoted into a Capital City after meeting a few more requirements, making it one of the front runners for building such a high-rank city.

This city was situated in the middle of a mountain and a dense forest. This spot was specifically chosen by the higher echelons of the guild as there were a lot of high-level maps nearby. The region right behind the mountain was just one of them.

The guild had also built a simple stronghold right above the mountain and sturdy walls that would guard them from any kind of invasion. It also served as a form of watchtower that would oversee their territory. It was just a pity that they had yet to own this land since they had not met all the requirements to own territory.

The streets of the city were quite busy as a lot of players visited this place due to the high-level maps nearby. This almost endless flow of visitors generated quite a lot of profit for the Wing's Alliance, especially when all the shops, inns, restaurants, and other forms of business establishments were owned by them.

They also had various virtual shops set up in different places in the city that were connected to the real world. This generated another form of profit for the corporation behind the Wing's Alliance.

Since this place was owned by one of the Powerhouse Guilds within the game, there were a lot of players, who visited this place to apply as a member. Quite a lot of experts also visited this city to test their luck and challenged other elites in the Battle Arena, especially when it was connected to other cities owned by the Wing's Alliance.

These were just a few of the advantages of being a powerful guild with a solid foundation.

In the headquarters of the Wing's Alliance, a lot of their higher-ups were gathered due to the emergency meeting that the Grand Elder had issued.

"Why did the Grand Elder call us here? Don't tell me he is finally revealing his fangs."

"You should be quiet, what if the others misunderstand your words?"

"What's there to hide? Isn't everyone new that the Grand Elder is challenging the authority of the Alliance Leader? It is no secret."

"That's right. He is even getting bolder each day as if he was saying that he will take over the entire guild."

"He even timed this one perfectly as most of the leaders working under the direct orders of the Alliance Leader are currently in an important expedition."

"I can tell that he is waiting for this opportunity to arrive."

"I wonder what the Alliance Leader and the Lawrence Family will do."

"What else? Of course, they will fight back and declare a war if necessary."

The people who were gathered in the conference room chatted among themselves in whispering voices, afraid that the loyal supporters of the current Alliance Leader would go crazy after hearing them.

Clank!

Not long after, a group of people entered the room. There was a man, who looked like in his early thirties leading the group while the rest followed behind him with arrogant looks on their faces.

"Tsk! Look at those faces. They sure come here fully prepared."

"I wonder what plans the Grand Elder prepared this time."

As the whispers continued, the Grand Elder, who was leading the group took a seat right beside the head seat that was supposed to be for the Alliance Leader.

Across him sat another man in his thirties, slightly older than the Grand Elder. This person glared sharply at the latter. "You sure have become bolder. What kind of scheme are you plotting right now?"

"Scheme? What are you talking about, Second Elder? People may misunderstand your words if they hear you," replied the Grand Elder with a smile.

The Second Elder did not buy those words as he knew that this sly fox was plotting something once again. It had been a while since the Grand Elder revealed his ambition, and he had been doing everything he could to weaken the influence of the current Alliance Leader to allow himself to snatch that seat.

The Grand Elder smirked before continuing. "I just want to propose a very rare opportunity to the Alliance Leader. My people happen to stumble upon a very interesting quest this time. And from the looks of it, the quest is at least an Empire Quest that can allow us to set up a territory."

He did not bother to hide his words and even said them loudly so that the other people in the conference room to go crazy.

What was a territory? It was an important resource that the guild could use to gain a lot of profits!

To these people, who came to represent their respective factions within the corporation, such an opportunity would be welcomed by them.

But despite how alluring those things were, the Second Elder could not help but squint his eyes as he could feel that there was a scheme hidden somewhere in those poisonous words.

And the answer immediately came.

"It is just a pity that the Alliance Leader does not have enough people to proceed with this Empire Quest as most of them are busy with their respective promotion quests and the expedition that is currently going on."

"I wonder if he can let me choose the people, who will be doing this quest," added the Grand Elder as his lips curved into a devious grin.

'I knew it!' thought the Second Elder as he could already see what this sly fox was plotting.

This said Empire Quest would make the other higher-ups be swayed. This would make these businessmen gain more confidence from the Grand Elder, making his influence grow stronger.

If the Grand Elder gathered enough people and managed to successfully clear the quest, earning them a territory, the other elders of the guild would most likely see him in a new light.

Their decisions would also be swayed by these recent successful events, affecting their votes for the next internal competition.

If the Grand Elder proposed to change the leader after that competition, then the current Alliance Leader would be most likely to lose in the election.

The situation was not in their favor, especially when the opposing side seemed to have gained a lot of mysterious experts somewhere.

Their faction was clearly in danger.

As the tension between the two elders was getting stronger, the door suddenly opened once again followed by the entrance of the Alliance Leader along with a pair of hooded individuals. One of them was familiar with everyone within the room as he was the leader of the Golden Feathers, but the other person was quite a mystery to them.

As the Alliance Leader sat on his designated seat, the two hooded individuals stood on each of his sides, right behind him.

"Alright, let's begin. I heard the rough details earlier on my way here, but I want to hear everything," said the Alliance Leader.

Hearing that, the Grand Elder stood up and started presenting his proposition.

Everyone within the conference room remained silent, especially when the leader himself was not saying anything. But deep inside, these people were thinking all the same. They could see that the Grand Elder had prepared everything, wanting to show his intention to the Alliance Leader.

They all were thinking that the Grand Elder had come fully prepared for this, and even brought a couple of experts with him, saying that these were just a few of the people that he would be bringing to the mission.

Arthur, who was silently listening to everything, could not help but smile as he watched this fool of an elder lay out his plan. He might not be the smartest, but he could at least see that this Grand Elder was trying to plot something.

The Grand Elder was trying to grow his influence within the council of the guild while the Alliance Leader was powerless and could not do anything due to his lack of manpower.

It seemed like this elder was trying to pressure the Alliance Leader with the number of people on his side. Most of the elders and other leaders on the side of the Alliance Leader were currently not present due to important missions that they had.

Adding the current update of the game, where they had to discover more maps and explore the new contents of the game, these people were currently busy with their respective businesses.

From the look of it, this Grand Elder had plenty of time on his hands to play politics.

Arthur continued to watch from the side as he was quite interested in what this elder was trying to do. He felt that taking over the entire Wing's Alliance was just one of his goals, but he could not tell what the others were.

After the meeting, Arthur and the Alliance Leader were back to one of the secret bases of the latter.

"That is not a bad plan for that old fox. It seems like he is trying to play aggressively on the surface, but I can smell that he is hiding something underneath," said Arthur as he took a seat.

"Heh! That's new. You are not someone who likes to stick your nose into something like this. What's gotten into you?" asked the Alliance Leader as he sat across Arthur.

Arthur shrugged his shoulders and pursed his lips. "I am not sure either. But I feel like something fun is going to happen soon."

"Whatever," the Alliance Leader shook his head. "But are you sure that it is fine for you to stay here? Are your friends not looking for you?"

Arthur waved his hand and said. "Nah! I still have plenty of time on my hands. It is still not the time for us to gather since the rest are still busy with their respective promotion quest."

He then paused and looked at the Alliance Leader before saying. "Speaking of which, you should start doing yours too. You will be left behind if you delay it a little longer."

The Alliance Leader could not help but smile bitterly when he heard that. "What can I do? This is one of the responsibilities of being a leader. I can't do things that I want if it is meant to affect the guild."

"If I suddenly get busy, those hyenas waiting in the dark will bare their fangs and bite me from behind," he added with a sigh.

"Tsk! Tsk! This is why guild with politics has never been good for people like us," commented Arthur as he felt relieved for not ending up in the same situation.

He then thought of something before asking. "So, what are you going to do with that quest? Are you going to leave everything to that sly fox? I can see that he is trying to use this opportunity to weaken your influence within the guild."

"You may have delayed it a little earlier, but the pressure on your back will only grow after this," he added, warning the latter with a solemn tone.

The Alliance Leader sighed when he heard that as he also recalled what happened. "It is not like I can do anything at the moment. Well, it is true that I don't have enough people for that quest."

"I am sure that my family will be swayed by the Grand Elder sooner or later if this continues to be like this," he added in a helpless tone.

Arthur stared at the Alliance Leader for a couple of moments before mumbling. "I do have some plan myself, but it is not related to this issue."

The Alliance Leader raised his head and looked at Arthur confusedly as he heard those words.

Arthur, on the other hand, waved his hand and shook it off. "Forget it. I'll tell you when the time comes."

Chapter 1337: Forming a Sword Heart

...

Ashin stayed in the Sacred Light Kingdom just like what the Elven Seer had told him. Within the two days (in-game time) of his stay, he spent most of his time hunting in the wilderness, trying to apply what he had learned recently both inside and outside the game.

What he had learned from Old Ryong was something that interested him greatly. He kept on applying it on every swing that he did with all the swords under his arsenal.

Due to this, his expertise when it came to using the 'Judgement Form' of 'Mondi's Style' Legacy Skill grew higher every time he swung his sword.

His understanding of infusing his will to his sword might still be a little shaky, but if it was just a singular will, then he was confident that he could use it very well. The will that contained 'heaviness' into it was quite a strong variable that made his attacks much stronger.

Every strike that he had with any of his swords and elements was much different compared to what it used to be. They all had this sense of heaviness that seemed to be impossible to defend or endure in a frontal confrontation.

But Shin knew that it was not very efficient to keep attacking with these heavy strikes since he would be lacking other areas. However, that was just a simple disadvantage when there was a singular will that he could infuse with his attacks, and it was something that he had yet to master.

If he learned a few more of these 'wills', then he would be able to attack with more versatility, especially if he could switch between them along with the Myriad Transformation Swordsmanship.

He could already see what he could do inside the game with the current fighting style that he had, which made him quite curious about how Old Ryong would help him with his swordsmanship in the real world.

...

Shin was currently waiting in a ceremonial room, where he was waiting for the Elven Seer to arrive. He was instructed to wait here as the preparations for his 'Sword Heart' were finally complete.

He was not sure how this would play out, but he could at least make a few guesses given that he was asked to wait in this room.

It was another room within the World Tree. A small and enclosed room with a little platform situated at the center.

From what Shin could see, it seemed to be an altar used for gathering the energy from the surroundings and concentrating it on whoever standing at the center.

Clank!

Not long after, the door was suddenly opened while Shin was observing the interior. When he turned his head and looked, he saw the old seer entering the room while being supported by the wooden cane.

Shin could also see the old elf carrying a wooden box in one hand. He could already guess what was inside, expecting that it was where the core he had gotten from King Yulis went. However, he was not sure what the Elven Seer had done as it seemed to have become much smaller given the size of the box.

The old elf smiled at Shin when he saw the young man before gesturing toward the center of the room. "You should stand there and get a feel of the blessing of the World Tree."

Shin raised his brows for a moment before following the instructions of the old seer. He walked forward and stood at the altar situated at the center of the room.

He was confused at first as he could not feel anything different. But when he tried to close his eyes and focus his senses, he was suddenly given a surprise.

Using his senses, he felt a variety of elemental particles lingering in the air. He could tell that these particles were clumps of mana much denser than the than he had seen outside, which was supposedly a heaven for mages and other magic-related classes already.

When he focused a little more and tried to pull these particles, all of them moved toward his direction without any resistance before being absorbed by his body.

The moment these elemental particles were absorbed, Shin could feel that his mana pool was slowly growing. The quality of his mana was also being refined at a rapid pace.

This lasted for quite a long time before the sensation weakened.

When he opened his eyes, he felt rather different. Something seemed to change within him, but he could not figure out what exactly it was.

Before he could even try looking into it, the Elven Seer walked over and handed the wooden box to him. "You can explore the changes later. For now, take this opportunity to absorb this thing and you will get what you desire."

"The remaining energies within this room and the ones that you have absorbed will help you in the process. But make sure not to get swept by it, or else you will be devoured by this power," he warned with a serious tone.

Shin accepted the wooden box while looking at the old elf. When he opened it, he saw a small marble sealed in a transparent cube.

It was a smaller version of the core that he had gotten from King Yulis, but he could feel that had a much denser and more concentrated energy.

He could also feel the sharp aura that was being emitted by it as a gentle flow of mana was being released.

As Shin was too absorbed in the core of his hands, the Elven Seer instructed. "You can sit on the altar and activate its formation the same way you did earlier. Once activated, it will immediately release a powerful suction force that will absorb all the remaining energies within the room while transferring them toward this core."

"At that time, you must keep your mind sharp and remain focused while absorbing it. As this core is supposedly not yours to begin with, it will show some rejection and fight against your will."

"Your consciousness will be sent toward an independent space within your mind where you will be fighting the remaining 'consciousness' of the previous king."

"You must win and pass the tests to form your Sword Heart. If you lose, then you will be gone forever while your body will become nothing but a Sword Slave," he warned with full seriousness.

After that, the Elven Seer turned around and walked toward the exit. "This is how far I can help you. The rest will be in your hands."

Once the Elven Seer walked out of the room and closed the door, Shin stared at the core on his hands before keeping the wooden box.

He then sat cross-legged on the ground before holding the core with both of his hands, placing it right in front of his chest.

Closing his eyes, he followed his instincts and activated the formation within the room just like how he did earlier.

Swoosh!

Within an instant, Shin's mind seemed to have gone blank as if he had lost consciousness.

...

Outside that room, the Elven Seer stared at the door for a couple of moments before turning around.

Right around the corner of the corridor, a muscular dwarf walked out from behind the pillar and walked alongside the elf.

"It is a surprise that you are acquainted with this young hero," said the Elven Seer before asking. "I thought you hated getting involved with that church, how come you are now volunteering to lend a hand, Saint Blacksmith Berlin?"

The old dwarf scoffed as he heard a hint of sarcasm in those words. He then slightly turned his head and looked over his shoulder while saying. "Things happen, and it is hard to explain."

"Let's just say that I have become acquainted with the young man due to our current king. He then becomes the reason why I'm able to break through my current hurdle and become what I am today."

The Elven Seer was silent for a moment before saying. "Is that so? But will you be fine after helping him multiple times? You say that you are even entrusting him to collect the materials for the Divine Armor of your Ancestor. Are you planning to give it to him? Is he the chosen one?"

In the face of that series of questions, Berlin could not immediately reply. He seemed to have thought of something before nodding his head. "You can say that. Let's say that it must be fate."

"The very armor that was used by those thieves to kill that particular god will now be handed to his descendant," he added before pausing and turning to the side. "But aren't you the same?"

"You have refined that core to the best of your abilities despite paying such a huge price. I don't think that you will continue to live long if you remain as stubborn as this, Federeth."

The Elven Seer named Federeth smiled bitterly before answering. "The young hero saves my kingdom, so it is natural for me to do as much."

"Even going to refine that core until it becomes a pure inheritance and a sword seed? I doubt that it is just a reason," said Berlin skeptically.

Federeth smiled bitterly while admitting it. "Let's just say that it is indeed fate. Moreover, our goddess seems to want this young man to inherit that Sword Heart and help him grow faster."

As these were happening, Shiella, who had just gone back online, currently wore a grim expression on her face as she glared at Delusive Smile in front of her.

"Do you know how much I am looking for my long-awaited rest after my trip? Yet here you are telling me that there is another problem to deal with?" said Shiella after a long silence.

Delusive Smile kept a meek smile while apologizing. "I am sorry, young miss. But trouble keeps on coming our way as if it is attracted by something."

"What is it this time?" asked Shiella, sighing.

"A few Powerhouse Guilds seem to finally notice our movements and trying to stick their noses to our business," replied Delusive Smile.

Hearing that, Shiella's expression suddenly turned serious as she understood what her assistant meant when she said 'sticking their noses'. "Are attacking us?"

"Not exactly, but they are quite close," replied Delusive Smile.

Shiella massaged her temples before asking. "Which guilds are they? And which branches are they planning to attack."

"Black Market and Hydra Guild. They seem to be targeting the mines in the Starry Spear Mountain Forest and our branches in the Rainbow Kingdom respectively," reported Delusive Smile.

"They seem to be aware that we are focusing on migrating our people and can't afford to redirect our forces to another place," she added after reading the reports that were sent to her.

"It seems like these two are trying to retaliate for the losses that they have suffered because of us," commented Shiella.

Delusive Smile hesitated for a moment before continuing. "And the Hydra Guild seems to be trying to hinder us from selling our lands and other assets in other kingdoms. It seems like they have figured out something."

Shiella frowned deeper and complained a little. "What's with these guys? Don't they have to focus on developing their own territory that they have recently gotten and solidifying its defenses? Why are they trying to mess with us?"

She felt so exhausted just by hearing those reports.

She was trying to look for a solution to their current situation when she thought of something. "Contact the Dragon Pavilion and offer them cooperation. Tell them the movements of the Hydra Guild and let them deal with it."

"Then put up a bounty on the Elite Teams and Top Experts of the Hydra Guild in the Assassin Union. Don't care about the price, just issue a continuous bounty until I say that it is enough."

"As for the mines, focus on defending it. Send a few of the available chiefs if possible. Tell them to buy as much time as possible until we finish settling."

Delusive Smile hesitated for a moment when she heard those words. She could understand the latter part since that was how they normally dealt with things. But the previous instructions were a little puzzling. It sounded like they were declaring war with the Hydra Guild when they were supposed to focus on other things.

Understanding what was running inside her assistant's head, Shiella smiled before continuing. "Don't worry, I have a plan. I will be borrowing a knife to stab them."

...

The state of the game was currently very chaotic due to multiple events that were happening simultaneously. There were huge forces that kept clashing against each other to fight for the resources of their respective regions, kingdoms, or empires.

The Powerhouse Guilds and other organizations were starting to get more active after their top experts started to clear their respective promotion quests.

Multiple Godlike Players and a few peak Titled Rankers were starting to get promoted to the third tier of their respective classes. This also started to show the gap between the real experts and the average players.

Some of the top experts were lucky enough to get an Ascended Class, propelling their strengths to another level. A few of them were even able to successfully change their races into an Ascended Race in a single try, after passing all the tests that the Mysterious Instructions had given them, and even passing them with flying colors.

These players got their names listed in the special ranking list of the Hall of Fame. Both their classes and races were written right beside their in-game ID, which attracted quite a lot of attention from the top guilds and organizations within the game.

Some of these players were familiar names since they were well-known experts in the virtual world and top players in the previous games.

What the top powers wanted to keep an eye on were the new names that they had not seen before. There was a huge investigation launched by these groups, looking for independent players to invite them.

But these players were just the start. It was because more experts started to appear in the Hall of Fame one after another.

What surprised the top powers of the game were the players that were able to reach tier 3 of their respective classes despite only having the standard class and race.

These players just proved that the advantage of the Transcendent and Ascended Classes and Races was nothing but a slight edge. Having the regular and standard classes and races did not mean that they would not be able to clear their promotion quests.

However, some also admitted that the challenges that these players faced during their promotion quests were easier than the Transcendent and Ascended ones. In a sense, their quests were much easier in comparison.

But that did not mean that their promotion quest was a walk in the park. They also suffered great setbacks and difficult challenges during the process, reflecting their respective skills and strengths.

As a reward for these players, who faced all the challenges fearlessly and went through them with full perseverance, the system gave them a dedicated panel in the Hall of Fame just for them.

There were twenty such players and all their names were posted and listed on the official website of the game.

Right now, the Hall of Fame consists of four panels; one for overall ranking, for which Shin stood at the very top due to all the accumulated achievements that he had, while the other three panels were meant for Transcendent, Ascended, and Champions, who either cleared their promotion quests or passed the tests of the Mysterious Instructors with the highest score possible.

These three panels consisted of all the top players under their respective banners. The players with special races that did not belong to these such as half-elves and others fell in the Ascended category since they had more advantages than the standard races.

Right now, all the top guilds and organizations were keeping their eyes on all the names listed on the Hall of Fame since they knew that these players would be leading the current stage of the game.

However, they were also aware that the list was not final as more players would appear on it and overtake the others.

The hidden experts and other Godlike Players had yet to tackle their promotion quests due to certain reasons.

Due to the successive appearances of the names on the Hall of Fame, the players, who were originally complaining about the promotion quests being unbeatable, stopped and focused on finding the solution instead.

Most of the independent players were still clueless about how those players in the Hall of Fame had done it, but the top organizations and guilds had already gotten their answers.

They started spreading their information network and looked for the Mysterious Instructions scattered across the entire Aurora Continent. They had also developed some strategies that they could use to clear the promotion quests much easier based on the information that they had gotten from the ones, who already cleared theirs.

As for the rest of their forces, aside from trying to expand their influence, they were looking for a way to own a territory for themselves while some focused on finding a way to leave the first continent and reach the second one.

But after their investigation, these guilds realized that clearing the tier 3 promotion quests and passing the tests of the Mysterious Instructors were just the bare minimum for meeting all the requirements to leave the continent.

There were still those things called recommendations or invitations to the Second Continent, which no one knew where to get.

Well, aside from Shin, who had gotten a few from Archbishop Ronald.

Aside from those, there was also the problem of how they were going to the Second Continent exactly. Everyone was too focused on the promotion quests and the opening of the Awakened Continent, which was why no one noticed that the official website did not mention how to get in there.

The players only realized this fact when there were already a lot of players listed in the Hall of Fame.

Everyone was looking for the answer to this when a certain player discovered a hidden city that was not letting any player enter, saying that they had yet to meet all the conditions to enter.

It was a city deep in a neutral region, which had yet to be discovered by a lot of players.

The said player, who stumbled upon it due to an accident, could only take a couple of photos and video clips in the distance.

From what he had collected, the city was much more advanced than the current cities available to everyone. This city had more buildings that were much taller than most and higher than the others that they had seen in the NPC cities.

The size of the city was also much larger than the Capital Cities that any players had seen. The Capital City was already the current highest rank of the cities within the game, yet this particular city was much larger and more advanced than any city of that rank.

Recalling the recent news that the players had gotten, along with the regional and world announcements that the system had made, the players came up with a conclusion that this city must be at least a Royal City, the rank next to the Capital City.

What surprised everyone was when they saw a huge airship ducking itself into one of the skyscrapers of the city. It was much larger than airplanes that could be seen in the real world and resembled the descriptions of those airships from fantasy stories.

Amazed, the players started commenting and demanding the said player to share the coordinates of that city as they also wanted to see it for themselves.

That player did not keep the information to himself, and shared it with everyone, making a lot of players head over there. Even if it was in the middle of a high-level map and located in a dangerous part of a neutral region, the players, who did not have anything better to do, could not be stopped.

Some of the players even form expedition teams just to reach that place.

In the meantime, some of the quick-witted ones and the other experts from well-known guilds expanded their information network a little more.

They sent some of their professional scouts to explore unknown neutral regions near their respective kingdoms and empires. That was when everyone realized that there were more of this city, which was clearly on the same rank.

There were a few distinctive differences between the said cities, but their ranks and such were practically the same. Even the airships that could be found in these cities had different designs and features, but all of them were used for long-distance transportation.

The airships that could be found in the human regions looked like wooden ships that were usually used during medieval times, but they had larger sails and there were a pair of huge wings on each of their sides.

There was a huge crystal situated at the center of the airship, which seemed to be its power source.

The airships that could be found in elven regions, on the other hand, had a similar design, but it was very noticeable that the materials used to produce this airship had magical properties. The magic crystals that were supporting the airship were much smaller compared to the former, but they had much denser energies and possessed wind elemental mana.

As for the airships that were found in the cities under the dwarven regions, the players noticed that they were made from metal and magical ores. It was clear that the design of these airships was meant for mechanical movements.

In a sense, these airships were much closer to the aircraft that could be found in the real world. But they had less efficient machines in comparison. However, they also had more advanced technology in certain areas.

The more interesting part was the airships from the undead region. Their airship seemed to be a combination of human technology and elven magic. But instead of using magic crystals as a power source, they were using flying undead monsters. However, their defenses seemed to be much tougher than the previous two.

As these cities became known to the public, the top guilds and other organizations started putting more focus on finding how they would be able to enter.

Everyone was confident that they would be able to find the right answer to these cities.

As everyone was currently busy with these events, there was a certain someone, who was currently meditating inside a certain room within the World Tree.

It was Shin, who was in the middle of a trial within his Sea of Consciousness.

He forgot how long it was, but he had yet to find the answer to the test that was given to him by the core. All he knew was that he had been here for a very long time already.

He was standing in the middle of a graveyard, which used different swords instead of tombstones.

Shin had used everything he could, but he still could not find any difference between all these swords. He observed each of them closely while walking around earlier, yet he had not noticed anything aside from their rusty appearances.

He had gone quite far, but it seemed like the sword graveyard was endless, which was why he decided to stop for a moment.

He then tried to grab the swords, but he was unable to touch any of them, which had given him the idea of what he needed to do. But he still goes back to the original problem, which was how he would find the sword that he was looking for.

Caught in a difficult situation, Shin decided to take a different approach. Instead of actively looking for the said sword, he would try to let it look for him.

He was not sure if this was going to work, but he did not have a choice, so could only continue.

Unsheathing the sword hanging on his waist since his appearance in this place, Shin started swinging, practicing each of the sword techniques that he knew. Starting with the fundamentals of swordsmanship up to the most advanced techniques in his arsenal.

As more time went by, he had gotten more immersed in his training and forgot his real purpose in coming here.

And unknown to him, in a most ironic way, the surroundings seemed to have responded to his actions and showed some signs of change.

Chapter 1339: Forming a Sword Heart (Part 3)

.....

Shin had forgotten about the time and his purpose of staying in this inner world that he was in. All that he could think of at this moment was to continue polishing his skills and swordsmanship.

He continued to swing his sword, practicing all the sword techniques that he knew and could use inside the game. He did not know much he could improve by doing this, but he could feel something strange within. Something was changing, but he was not sure what it was.

Regardless, he continued to swing the [Yamato] repeatedly while also sheathing and unsheathing it frequently, executing his sword-drawing techniques.

As he was doing that, he was unaware of the changes within his surroundings. The seemingly endless sword graveyard was slowing compressing and moving toward him as if he was its center.

This was his Sea of Consciousness, so it was natural for him to be its center.

In the meantime, the countless swords that were within it were also conversing, seemingly trying to merge with one another. They were fusing into one, trying to form a single sword.

Not long after, these swords disappeared one after another and finally became a sword that seemed to solely own the entire sword graveyard.

Bang!

With a final strike from Shin, a surge of energy surged toward him before fusing with his body. It formed a spiral wave with his left chest as the center.

Feeling this sensation, Shin sheathed his sword and stood still. He raised his head while closing his eyes as he tried to savor the current moment.

This scene lasted for quite a while until the space itself started to crumble and move toward Shin.

Swoosh! Swoosh! Swoosh!

At the same time, the sword that was made of the countless swords of the graveyard hovered in the air above Shin in an upside-down manner before descending. It fell at a constant pace until its tip touched the center of Shin's forehead.

Bang!

There was a silent explosion within this space as a shockwave spread in every direction. It continued until it reached the edge of the crumbling world before rapidly retreating to Shin once again, converging in a single point.

The suction force dragged everything around it, pulling even the already crumbling place and bringing it to Shin.

The point where the tip of the sword and the center of Shin's forehead formed a small sphere as everything within this place seemed to have gathered it.

There seemed to be a certain resistance from Shin as the glowing sphere and the descending sword were unable to penetrate. It was as if something powerful was trying to block the two from entering Shin's mind.

This lasted for quite a long time before the resistance that was coming from Shin dropped. It disappeared as if someone had opened the door for it to enter.

As the sphere and the sword entered Shin's head, he felt a surge of information rushing in his mind as if someone was passing their memories and experiences to him.

Shin felt like he was living the life of the said person.

The swordsmanship and other forms of insights entered his head before forming a small seed in a part of his Sea of Consciousness. It floated in the air while releasing a brilliant light containing an immense and concentrated Sword Intent.

While Shin slowly opened his eyes, he felt a surge of power within him that he was unable to explain. Nothing seemed to have changed a first glance, but he could sense that this new power was within him.

He felt a little foreign to it at first due to his unfamiliarity with wielding it, but he was rapidly getting over it over time as if the power itself was merging with him.

This was slightly different from what he was expecting.

This was somewhat the opposite of what Federeth, the Elven Seer, had told him earlier. The power within this sword that carried all the swords within the graveyard seemed to be not trying to consume Shin and instead wanted to take him as a new host.

He was expecting a huge battle between him and the previous owner of the Sword Heart as they were trying to take over it – or more specifically, his body.

He did not feel any resistance from the Sword Heart as it seemed to have submitted itself to him without any issue.

Instead of any form of resistance, the flood of information and experiences that he had received greeted him.

This felt that he had learned new sword techniques and other forms of swordsmanship that were different from what he knew.

When he put more thought into it, he found that the Sword Heart was located in a certain part of his inner consciousness, floating silently.

When he tried to focus on it, he felt that he would be able to practice any form of swordsmanship and execute them in battle without problem. It felt that he had become some sword of Sword Genius or sort.

That was when he finally received a notification from the system.

Ding

System: Congratulations! You have formed your Sword Heart!

System: Sword Heart Level – Seed.

Shin could not help but raise his brows when he saw it before mumbling. "That was it? I feel like I have not done anything at all."

He then opened a virtual screen and went to the panel that was specially meant for the Sword Heart.

[Ability Name]: Sword Heart

[Ability Level]: Seed (Entry)

Description:

Sword Seed (Unlocked): A Special Body Constitution that was perfect for swordsmanship. It allowed you to learn any form of swordsmanship or sword techniques quickly.

Sword Graveyard (Sealed): A Spiritual Place within your inner world where all your insights with the path of the sword were placed. Each sword within the graveyard represented a sword insight or a certain swordsmanship that you had learned.

Sword Mountain (Sealed): A Spiritual Representation of your Swordsmanship, particularly your Sword Path. A Sword Mountain was commonly a higher form of a sword graveyard, where your purest and greatest insight from the path of the sword was formed.

Sword Soul (Sealed): A Spiritual Avatar within your Sea of Consciousness, who lives at the peak of the Sword Mountain. It could cultivate your swordsmanship on its own and could even improve all your weaknesses and fix your flaws.

Sword Heart (Sealed): The pinnacle level of the Sword Heart, which unlocked all your potential and unleashed all your insights.

"As long as you have the Sword in your Heart, anything becomes a Sword in your hands."

Shin was somewhat surprised at what he just read. He was not expecting to get such information. It also felt that it was something that came from the real world as well.

From what he could see, this seemed to be what a real Sword Heart was supposed to be, and it was laid in front of his eyes in a detailed manner.

"A Sword Heart is some sort of special body constitution? Well, this is new," he mumbled as he dwelled into his thoughts. "In a sense, it seems to be a version of my 'Spiritual Embryo', but more suited for Swordsmanship instead of Mentalism."

He was not sure if he met someone with a Sword Heart in the real world before, but he felt that it was most likely the case.

To be more precise, that guy Dylan White, whom he sparred with in the real world, and also the guy behind Zero inside the virtual world, most likely had such a special constitution.

"Those this mean my 'Spiritual Embryo' also has this kind of level as well?" he wondered as he said to himself. "I guess I also have to explore more about it later when I have the time."

At this moment, Shin's consciousness was pulled back by the system and sent to his virtual avatar.

When he opened his eyes, he found himself still sitting cross-legged at the center of the special room, where Federeth had left him.

He did not immediately stand as he closed his eyes once again and tried to focus his mind on the Sword Seed that was currently inside him. Then the same sensation overwhelmed him once again, signifying that everything that he had tried inside his Sea of Consciousness was real.

He now felt that his swordsmanship reached another level, at least inside the game. He then wondered if this could also affect his main body in the real world just like what happened to him when his 'Immediate Response' innate talent had evolved into 'Ultra Instincts' for the first time inside the game.

"Let's set it aside for now since I will immediately notice it once I log out of the game later," he mumbled before looking at the time.

It then surprised him as he found that he was already late in the morning. It was already six o'clock, which meant that he was late for his morning training.

"What the heck? That much time has passed already? I know that I have spent quite a long time inside that place, but I don't expect that it would be this long," he said as he sprung up from his seat and quickly rushed out of the room.

When he existed, he was immediately greeted by Ithilien and Owen, who seemed to be waiting for him for quite a while already.

"Oh! You are finally out, vice commander! We thought that you would take a little longer!" said Ithilien as she felt a little relieved.

Shin looked at the two before asking. "What is it? Is there something urgent that is happening? Is there an emergency?"

Owen smiled and shook his head. "It is not like that. The Elven Seer has instructed us to guard the place and don't let anyone disturb you, so we are here."

"We first think that it will only be a couple of hours since that is what Sir Federeth has told us, but we do not expect that it will last for hours," he added with an awkward smile.

Standing here and doing nothing might be boring for others, but not for Owen, who could enjoy his time chatting with Ithilien as she was stuck with him due to this task.

He could spend a longer time like this instead of doing missions and grinding for resources. He even set aside his class promotion quest for the time being due to this.

This quality time was something he enjoyed, so he felt rather disappointed than relieved that Shin finished with this short close-door training.

Shin could read Owen like an open book when he saw that expression before laughing at the latter. It took him quite a while to calm down before saying. "It seems like this place is already stable and everything is under control. I can now go back to Saint Heaven Kingdom and focus on the other task that needs to be done there."

"I will be leaving now," he said before urging the two to finish their promotion quests as soon as possible. "You two should focus on reaching Tier 3 now so that we can proceed to the Second Continent already."

He then took out a return scroll and crushed it, teleporting himself back to their main kingdom.

Seeing that Shin turned into specks of light, Owen turned awkwardly to Ithilien before asking. "So, where are we again?"

Ithilien rolled her eyes on him before turning around and walking away.

"Hey! Ah... I mean Joyce! Don't we agree to meet later? Let's go hang out after class!" said Owen as he felt that he just missed an important opportunity due to Shin's sudden interruption earlier.

He wanted to blame Shin and throw a fit, but he could not do it now since the latter had already left.

"D*mn you, Brother Swordsman! You should have exited that room a little later! Just a minute! Just a minute more and I should have succeeded in having a date!"

He could only cry due to his failure.

Chapter 1340: Return

...

Shin just did a round of fundamental training and a short meditation for his Mentalism before having a quick shower and getting ready to leave.

He was in a rush when he bumped into someone in the lobby.

He could not help but halt his steps and stare blankly at the person standing in front of him, who was also giving him an odd look.

"What's with that face? It looks like you have seen a ghost. Am I one?" asked Shiella as she glared at Shin.

Shin awkwardly smiled as he greeted her. "Oh! When did you get back, Big Sis?"

Shiella rolled her eyes at him while replying. "Last night. I want to rest for today, but it seems like there is going to be a special mission issued by the academy, and they are looking for a suitable leader."

"I happen to be away for quite some time, so I must make up for the missions that I have missed, so I will be taking this one. Uncle Nathan also says that I must take it since he needs someone that he can trust for the mission."

"He mentioned that this mission will be a collaboration between governments of different nations, the military, and the other organizations."

She paused for a moment and turned to Shin, wearing a worried look on her face, before continuing. "I can feel that there is a hidden plot behind this mission, so I want to hear the details from the professors and the elders as soon as possible."

Shin noticed something from that look and could not help but ask. "Have you heard anything from uncle?"

Shiella shook her head. "That's not it. It is just the feeling that I am getting. Even the Magic Ace Academy and the Top Military School are involved, so something is going on."

Pausing for another time, she smiled. "I am just worried that it will be too much for you and the others to handle. Given the current information that I have gotten, the risk of the mission is a little too high for your level."

She could sense that Shin had grown tremendously since the last time she had seen her, but she felt that the events that were about to take place were way beyond their levels.

In the meantime, Shin felt a little strange after seeing the expression that Shiella was showing him. He knew how much she cared for him and Arthur, but she usually hid it most of the time. He also knew that she kept on beating them because she wanted them to grow stronger much faster.

It was her form of training and showing her care for them.

But the current expression that she was giving him was rather strange. He was not sure why, but he felt that Shiella knew something that she could not tell him.

Unable to suppress his curiosity, he could not help but ask. "Is there something wrong, Big Sis?"

Shiella stared at him for quite a while before shaking her head. "No. It is nothing."

She then turned around and said. "Let's go. You are heading to the academy too, am I right? Give me a ride. We also have some matters to discuss about the game."

She took a couple of steps forward when she suddenly paused and turned to him again before saying. "Shin, remember this. I will protect you no matter what. And you will always be my little brother."

After saying her piece, she quickly turned around and resumed her steps, walking away gracefully.

Shin stared blankly at her back for a few moments before a shiver ran through his back. He cringed hard after hearing those words. He could not imagine how embarrassed Shiella was at the current moment.

But after seeing how calm Shiella was, he smiled bitterly and shook his head repeatedly. He then shrugged his shoulders before chasing after her. "Wait, Big Sis!"

At the parking lot, the two bumped into one more person, who was about to enter his car.

Arthur, who was rushing to his car, wanted to avoid Shiella. He hastened his steps, trying to get into his car as soon as possible. But before he could even increase the distance between him and the two, he suddenly felt a soft hand tapping his shoulder.

"Arthur Springfield. Are you not going to greet your big sister, who just came back from her trip?" said Shiella with a voice as cold as a thousand-year-old ice.

Arthur suddenly paused and slowly turned his head as if he were a mechanical puppet before smiling brightly at Shiella. "Oh! You're back, Big Sister? How is your trip?"

Shiella rolled her eyes at him before pointing at Shin's Black Panther. "Ride with us. I have something to discuss with you."

"Eh!? But Shin is taking a different class from us. He will not be joining the special mission with us. Old Man Lin said that he has another plan for him," reasoned Arthur, trying to avoid riding with Shiella.

Shiella then turned to Shin with an inquiring look, which the latter confirmed with a slight nod. She seemed to have a sigh of relief when she saw that before nodding her head. "That's good."

But she still rejected Arthur's indirect rejection. "But you are still going with us. I heard that you have too much free time on your hands inside the game."

"That is not true! I am dealing with a business with the Wing's Alliance," Arthur said, denying those words.

"Perfect! I happen to be looking for an additional knife that I can borrow," said Shiella, refusing to let him go.

"But what about my-..." Arthur was still trying to make an excuse when Leonard suddenly appeared and greeted Shiella.

Seeing the guy made Arthur grimace and shook his head, mumbling. "Should I say that you have a terrible or perfect timing?"

"Obviously, it is perfect timing," Shiella answered for him and pointed her chin at Leonard. "Give him your keys and let him drive your Golden Jaguar."

She then turned around and headed toward Shin's car as the latter opened the door for her.

Arthur could not do anything as he tossed the car key to Leonard while scowling. He then walked toward the passenger seat of Shin's car with a reluctant and defeated look on his face.

...

When Shin arrived at the headquarters of the Research Department and entered the secret training room, he was immediately greeted by a lively atmosphere.

His seniors, who were away for a special mission, came back and were back to their respective training routines. He felt quite impressed with them as he saw them working hard despite just coming back.

"Hoh~! Look who is this? Isn't this my cute little junior," said a seductive voice coming from behind.

Shin felt a shiver as a pair of soft hands and flexible arms wrapped around his shoulders and a pair of soft mounds pressed on his back.

He did not have to turn his head to know who it was. There was a single person within the department, who liked to pull such a 'prank' to anyone she liked.

"Senior Selena, don't you think that this is inappropriate? People will misunderstand if you keep doing things like this," he said helplessly as he knew that he would not be able to escape now since she had already caught him.

What scared him the most about this senior was she always appeared around him without any notice. She was a perfect assassin, and in a different way when compared to Jerimiah and Vincent.

If she wanted to kill him, then she would be able to do it silently – without him being able to put any resistance.

"What's the problem with that? It is not like you have a girlfriend or anything. The same goes for me," she refuted before a mischievous thought entered her mind. "What do you think about dating me instead? Don't you feel quite thrilled about the idea of seeing someone like me?"

She then licked her lips and was about to tighten her hug when Shin took that opportunity. He used the timing when she loosened her arms to adjust her position to escape.

He first put a layer of Mental Energy around his body before activating a series of Mentalism Runes such as Haste Rune, Strength Rune, and Flexible Rune in the process.

He broke free from her arms and ran straight to the training room designated for his special training.

"Let me say a pass to that offer, Senior! I am too busy to be seeing someone!" he said without turning his head back.

"Eh!? What is this? Am I being rejected once again? I think it is the fourth time already. Am I starting to lose my charm?" Selena stared blankly at Shin's back, surprised at what happened.

She then realized something and mumbled. "He has gotten much stronger than the last time we have seen him! What happened?"

"You should ask Benedict and Professor about that if you are that curious," said a person, who was wrapped in a blanket on the side.

Who knew since when this guy was sleeping here? But Shin seemed unable to sense his presence since earlier.

This person seemed to be half-asleep when he said those words while turning and adjusting his position into a more comfortable one. He was treating this training ground as a sleeping area.

"Hey! Mahon! Are you an iguana or chameleon or something? How come your camouflage has gotten much better than before?" asked Selena with a frown.

"Try training the Turtle Breathing Technique while sleeping and you will know how good the results of your sleep are," he answered in a very sleepy manner as if he was already about to head to the dreamland.

Selena rolled her eyes and complained. "How come everything that you have learned becomes a purpose for your sleep? And how are you so strong despite lazing around all day?"

"Get more quality sleep and you will understand," replied Mahon before his breathing became constant and silent.

He had gone to sleep...

At this moment, another person suddenly entered the training room and walked over to Selena. "How about you give that offer to me instead? I can date you all you want!"

Selena stared blankly at the newcomer as if he was some sort of loser before shaking her head. "You better put more effort into your training Dominic. You almost die on the previous mission."

Dominic stared at Selena's back as she walked away, particularly her butt which was swinging rhythmically with each of her steps.

Bang!

That was when a fist smacked his head and sent him to the ground.

"Look! Look at that habit of yours. Can't you focus more on increasing your strength? She is right, you almost die in the mission because of your laziness," said a bulky, two-meter guy as he walked past Dominic, and about to leave the training room.

"Rock! You don't have to hit me that hard!" complained Dominic while rubbing his head.

He then turned to Mahon and complained. "Why is this guy so much of a monster despite doing nothing but to sleep."

"If you want to become like him, then go look for a ten-star witch monster in the Dark Continent and get cursed when you are still in the womb of your mother," said Benedict as he emerged from another room adjacent to this one.

"You should know better than anyone how much suffering he went through to become like this," he added as he rubbed a towel on his head, drying his wet hair.

"That is why I am thankful to the professor for saving me and giving me a new life," Mahon, who was supposedly sleeping, replied as if he was talking in his sleep.

Benedict swept his gaze in the training room before nodding his head. "You guys prepare for the meeting. The professor wants us to gather at the conference hall during lunch. It seems like he will be announcing our next mission."

"Already? We just got back here; you know?" complained Dominic.

"It is not a mission for the Research Department or the Sleeping Dragons, but a real mission for 'us',"

emphasized Benedict.

Rock and Dominic went silent when they heard that as they understood what Benedict was trying to say.

The expression on their faces turned serious before heavily nodding their heads in acknowledgment.