

Once Human 701

Chapter 701 : A Week In Hell 3

It didn't take Arthur a long time to finish testing the six new recruits and if he were to rank them then the strongest is, of course, Ardor, followed by Cristina, Shu Ru, Bora, Rosea, and Ho Qing.

Cristina, especially, had a unique spear technique which greatly empowered her and allowed her realm to jump by a few grades. Furthermore, her black spear was a 2nd grade Mysterious-ranked artifact, something which is very rare to find, even in the richest sects.

Before he brought them to this training ground, Arthur had a small talk with each and every one of them and, apparently, the two friends, Cristina and Bora, deserted their sects due to some 'complications' and vowed to never betray Arthur if he protects them, which he agreed, obviously.

The Dark Blaze High Realm houses many strong sects, like the Dark Blaze Sect, the ruler of the realm and the place the duo originally hail from. There's also another interesting fact; Bora is deeply in love with Cristina but, it's not mutual, unfortunately for him.

To sum it up, Cristina is a cold and slightly haughty girl who's confident in her techniques and, amongst the six, she's the one who mastered her spear technique almost to perfection. She even has the title 'Spear Destroyer', which is equal a grade below 'Sword Saint'.

When her attack couldn't even penetrate through Arthur's clothes, the girl wasn't that pleased, nonetheless, she didn't try anything funny.

Bora, on the other hand, was a calm and polite youth, full of energy and very optimistic about becoming part of the MoonStar sect. He also didn't hide his love for the girl and tried to get close to her whenever there's a chance.

Shu Ru and Rosea were two rare beauties and became friends in a matter of minutes.

The only one who stood in his corner and remained absolutely quiet was Ho Qing. He didn't interact with the rest and even when talked to, he would answer perfunctorily.

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When the testing was done and Arthur criticized their execution of the skills and in which category they were lacking in, he clapped his attention to gather their attention and spoke with a clear voice.

"The tournament isn't going to be a series of one versus one. There's many stages and there needs to be cooperation so... we'll begin with that."

...

In the blink of an eye, two days passed, Arthur faced the six youngsters with arms crossed and an ugly expression on his face. He did nothing and watched them bickering...

"It's your fault! I'm not the one who got caught by the vine!"

"What do you mean it's my fault? It was you who threw it at me!"

"Y-you guys... calm down."

Cristina and Rosea were disputing and Bora tried to calm them down but the two girls were furious and almost started fighting each other. In the end, the two were forced into submission as Arthur smacked the back of their heads with his hand.

It wasn't a fatal blow but, inexplicably, it hurt the two females so much that they fell on their butts and held their heads while begrudgingly glaring at him. They didn't dare curse at him and swallowed back their anger.

"One, two, three..."

As he started counting, the two hurriedly stood up, straightened their backs and apologetically bowed their heads to him. Cristina's defiance could be seen on her face as she gave him a piercing glare but Rosea's eyes were a bit teary as the pain was truly excruciating.

Arthur chuckled as he noticed Cristina's face, he raised his hand and smacked her again, this time knocking her unconscious.

He waved his hand, causing her body to float next to him before he ordered them to continue while disappearing with the girl. When the two came back, three to four hours later, Cristina's face was red from all the tears.

The cold and indifference that she usually had was nowhere to be seen, she just looked like a wronged teenage girl who got punished by her parents.

"That's two strikes for both of you. If I see you fighting again, you'll both be thrown out, understood?"

Cristina dropped her head and joined her new comrades while Rosea forced a smile and nodded her head continuously.

Actually, it wasn't only those two who always fought. Bora and Ardor would sometimes bicker too as the former would miss his target and accidentally hit the sword-wielding youth.

Only Shu Ru and Ho Qing were very obedient and followed Arthur's orders to the letter.

The hellish training they were going through was made of several stages. For the first day, he transformed the terrain into a poisonous area filled with thorny and moving vines, occasional earthquakes, erupting magma, cracking space, and told them to survive for at least 24 hours.

He didn't let them rest even when they used all their Nether Energy and that's because he wanted to force cooperation on them. When one cannot fight, another will protect him or her till they recover, and so on...

Actually, not even a Sovereign can escape unscathed from the transformed terrain so it goes without saying that the six were on the brink of death by the time Arthur brought them to safety.

Their bodies were fully healed thanks to his Life Energy but they were mentally exhausted, however, Arthur refused to let them rest and told each one of them to hit a dummy he created.

The dummy was glued to the ground and was the size of a normal tree. It didn't attack and its only function was to empty their Nether Energy pool.

And so, like that, everyday for the six youngsters was no different than hell itself. Their bodies were beyond tired and they would fall unconscious more often than not but that would only result in being brought to a separate dimension by Arthur and subjected to Dark Magic.

Arthur would use Dark Magic and make them feel an agonizing pain, so much in fact that they'll sober up and force themselves to complete the task within the time limit.

It's a very cruel way to train his new disciples but it was effective and by the 4th day, they significantly improved. Two of them even managed to achieve a breakthrough. It was Ho Qing and Cristina.

"The first test is just basic survival. You'll need to dodge flying metallic projectiles..."

Arthur stopped talking and by the next second, the sixth youths were blown away dozens of meters, their foreheads were reddened due to being hit by a supersonic metallic object.

"Of course, it won't be as fast as this one but it's still not something anyone can dodge."

Arthur could have shown them the speed of the bullets without hitting them, or so thought the six but none dared to complain, they just stood up real fast and lined up within two seconds.

Bora hesitantly raised his hand and when Arthur signaled for him to talk, he asked,

"Teacher... aren't you supposed to keep the stages of the tournament?"

The parasite spread his hands and replied, "I'm the organizer, moreover, it's not like I told you everything. I just gave you a tip about the first stage."

He furrowed his brows and asked back,

"Or perhaps you don't want me to help?"

"Nonono! Teacher, I, I was just c-curious."

The youth hastily dropped his hand and kept his mouth shut.

"The tournament begins the day after tomorrow and since I've taught you the basics and although I'm not that pleased with the results, your performances weren't that bad."

As he finished speaking, a graceful figure appeared next to him, her long silver hair shining under the setting sun. Lucy, who has been busy dealing with other things, rarely came to the training grounds and barely spent time with her husband.

Also, without exception, the six disciples were fearful of the White Specter, who wasn't as talkative as their teacher and is known to be a merciless killer. The parasite is also cruel and a very harsh and violent teacher, nevertheless, he seemed to be more social than his wife.

Even the rebellious Cristina wouldn't dare acted arrogantly in front of Lucy, who was more like a demon than a goddess.

"Beginning from this moment, Lucy will be training you..."

Arthur grinned at the six youngsters, who were startled by his statement.

"Hehehe... good luck!"

After saying that, the man vanished, leaving an expressionless silver-haired woman in his place.

Lucy looked at the six of them, her eye glowing with a blue light, which frightened them even more. She didn't even say anything and just vanished from their sight and when they came back to their senses, all six were sent flying in a direction, while Lucy motionlessly stood in the location they were standing at.

Chapter 702 : Phoenix Nirvana

"Not enough. Again."

Lucy wiped the blood off her sleeves before expressionlessly repeating the same words. The sixth youngsters were heavily injured and barely able to stand up. They were beaten back and blue by Lucy, who attacked without notice and inflicted almost fatal wounds.

She didn't use any magic and relied solely on her physical body, which is equal to her husband's. The couple's stats had long since surpassed the limiter and, if she wished for it, Lucy can even break down Mysterious artifacts with her bare hands.

"T-teacher can't we rest for a bit?"

Bora, who had enough of being beaten half-dead, hesitated once before voicing his true thoughts. Though the rest didn't say anything, the look on their faces clearly showed that they shared the same thoughts.

"No rest. Again."

Their energies were depleted and both Shu Ru and Ardor had their right and left arms, respectively, broken.

Actually, a while earlier, Cristina's spear snapped in half when it struck Lucy's palm. This made the girl fly into a rage, relentlessly leaping at the unresponsive Lucy.

She only calmed down when the White Specter reassured her that Arthur will be able to repair in an instant. Nevertheless, the pain from seeing her beloved weapon snap made Cristina dislike and fear Lucy even more.

Even Ardor refrained from using his sword and swapped it with a sword made from his own Sword Essence.

All of this happened in just two hours, which made the disciples despair. Lucy refused to speak and just attacked.

...

Three hours in, five of the six disciples fell unconscious. The last person managed to stand with a lot of difficulty, his body on the verge of breaking, blood coming out of his nose and mouth.

The youth, who's red hair matched the crimson liquid covering his clothes, clenched his shaking teeth and slowly raised his hand, unleashing several fireballs at Lucy, which were dispersed the moment they touched her clothes.

"Arthur did not lie when he said you're exceptional."

For the first time since her appearance, Lucy softly smiled and used her magic. Golden flames burst out from her hand and rose into the sky, appearing more blinding than the shining sun.

This sight seemed to mesmerize the half-conscious youth, his eyes reflecting the golden radiance of the flames.

"In the past, you were Arthur's enemy, right?"

Ho Qing didn't reply, his body shaking more intensely, the flames that were coming out of his hand now vanishing, completely overpowered by the Golden Crow fire.

"I can't have someone like you alive. Die."

After saying that, the golden flames cascaded on the defenseless youth, enveloping him within seconds. Ho Qing didn't even let out a sound as the fire burned his clothes and invaded his body, making him unable to naught but at the sky.

After a few minutes, a screech reverberated across the training grounds, followed by a divine pressure, emanating from none other than the red-haired youth.

Noticing this, Lucy increased the intensity of her flames but that only made the pressure increase by several folds.

"The end."

Lucy spoke the two words then clutched her open hand, making the blood turn Ho Qing into naught but ash.

However, not even ten seconds after his miserable death, an orange spark rose from the spark and a thick pillar of orange clear flames rose to the sky.

"Interesting. This is the first time I'm seeing a Phoenix's Nirvana."

Lucy crossed her arms and retracted her flames, enjoying the spectacular sight.

Ho Qing naked body appeared within the pillar of flames, his eyes releasing a crimson gleam. An illusory phoenix, which was backed by a pressure strong enough to threaten Lucy, hovered above the youth.

A couple of minutes later, everything calmed down and Ho Qing stood a dozen meters away from the silver-haired woman.

He looked at his unscathed body then casually wore a robe that he retrieved from his storage ring, which was affected by Lucy's fire.

Then, the youth bent his body ninety degrees toward Lucy and sincerely said,

"Thank you."

In response, Lucy shook her head and retorted,

"I don't need your gratitude. I was seriously trying to kill you."

Ho Qing remained expressionless and was about to speak again only for the woman to vanish. Knowing that he'll be hit, he unleashed a burst of flames much stronger than his previous ones, nevertheless, he still got blown away.

"Don't move for now."

As Lucy said that, she waved her hand, sending five pills flying into the disciples' mouths. A minute later, all their wounds were healed and their energies were restored.

They simultaneously woke up when a chilling energy crawled into their bodies. They appeared momentarily dazed before they spotted Lucy standing close to them.

They instinctively backed away then, after glancing at each other, they jumped at the White Specter...

A day later, it was finally the time for the competition. The city was filled to the brim with people from all over the Cloud Sea Universe. Even people from the Holy Dominion and Divine Planet were participating, which showcased how grand this tournament was going to be.

It was happening in the desolate land of Green-Leaf, a place that some never thought of visiting but, here they are, excited and eager to witness geniuses compete against each other.

Everyone, including King Isadore, his two protectors, and the MoonStar leaders, were present at an artificial yet massive plateau made from reinforced black steel.

The whole area of the tournament was created by none other than the parasite, who stood at the very top with Lucy right next to him.

Dozens of sect and clan masters, powerful cultivators, and countless spectators, were gazing at the couple, some envying them and others looking up to them.

"Today marks the beginning of a tournament made by the MoonStar Sect and the ruling kingdom of Green-Leaf. I won't waste time on useless stuff and just say that no one is allowed to interfere or lend a hand. Anyone who tries to misbehave will be personally handled by me. I hope I made myself clear."

After saying his piece, Arthur and Lucy sat down next to Isadore, who had a disgusting grin plastered on his young face. He seemed to be in a very good mood and could not wait until the tournament began.

"Considering that the enemy is right at our door's step, you seem to be enjoying this, Your majesty."

Hearing Arthur, Isadore chuckled and replied,

"Their presence matters not to me. So... do you want to make a bet?"

"A bet?"

"Yes. Who'll emerge victorious? Which team will surprise the world?"

Arthur turned his gaze toward a well-protected part of the plateau, right where the teams were standing.

Chapter 703 Teams

"Of course I think the disciples of my sect are going to win."

Arthur answered with absolute confidence as his gaze rested on the six youths standing next to each other.

"What about you?"-Arthur

In response to the parasite, Isadore chuckled and agreed by saying

"I'm the same."

"Quit screwing around, I know that you don't mean that."

Hearing Arthur's vulgar and rude words, Isadore laughed and corrected himself,

"Alright you got me! Although I sent a team of my own, I genuinely think it's either the Buddha Sect Team, the Demonic Team, or the Siren Kingdom team that will win."

As he mentioned these three teams, Arthur gazed at the first one of them. A team of 5 cultivators, all were males and bald, their ages ranging from 50 to 80.

By the way, the maximum age for participating is 100, which is considered young for the long-time cultivators. Although, previously, the buddha sect had grievances with Arthur and even banished him to Oblivious, which was, in fact, Riaravar, they didn't come here this time to cause trouble.

Not only did they publicly apologize to the couple, they also brought compensation in the form of spirit stones and a few rare artifacts. The one in charge of their team was, unsurprisingly, a monk, and an old one at that.

He was at the Exalted God Realm, he had average appearance and wasn't that talkative. Actually, even when the tournament was beginning, he was sitting in a corner, cross-legged, praying to Buddha.

The second team, called the Demonic Team, hails from the Demon Realm in the other universe. There's no restriction to join the tournament and your background does not matter so demons and devils were allowed, despite their enmity with many other races, such as the angels, for example.

The demonic only had two participants, just like the Holy Dominion. Both were girls, they had long black hair and an exceptional beauty. Arthur appraised them and the results were fascinating, nevertheless, they weren't the strongest out of the bunch.

Last but not least, the Siren Kingdom Team, which was composed of 9 mermaids that had the lower body of a fish, which was currently not visible as they used a specially crafted elixir to grant them temporary lower limbs. It came as a side-effect but it'll bring less disgust from the public, which was discriminating against races that looked different than humans. After all, the most common race in Cloud Sea is humans.

The nine pretty mermaids were the main focus of the young cheering crowd. They weren't arrogant or cold as they reciprocated by waving their hands and smiling at the spectators.

In addition to these three teams, Arthur's team, Isadore's team, and High Cardinal Patrick's team, there were 6 other teams, each composed of exceptional individuals that were the top of their sect, clan, organization, etc...

"Hey! Are you here?!"

Only when Isadore rudely waved his hand in front of Arthur's face did the latter snap out of his daze and frown at the king, who was behaving childish, totally unbecoming of a supreme ruler.

"This place is heavily fortified..."

A woman sitting right next to the High Cardinal, commented as she gazed at the golden shields surrounding the massive plateau along with the city. There was also the barely visible shadow of a black dragon staring down at them.

"..."

Cardinal Patrick also glanced at the formation but didn't speak, feeling uncomfortable and slightly pressured. He was a peak Overgod and didn't come here to cause trouble, nevertheless, he was instinctively disgusted by the lurking dragon made of dense Dark Magic. He was a devout believer of Sedos and anything that defies light is nemesis to him so it's natural that Dark Magic would affect him.

It wasn't threatening to a dangerous degree but the formation laid by Arthur will definitely weaken the two youths he brought.

"I hope he doesn't attack us."

The woman rubbed her arms together as she got the chills after glancing at Arthur and Lucy.

"So they are the infamous couple! Hmpf!"

The sect leader of the Dark Blaze Sect, ruler of the Dark Blaze Realm, snorted as he glared at the parasite and his wife. He was unhappy that his top disciples suddenly fled without any warning and wanted to forcefully bring them back.

Even when facing what he deemed as enemies, the middle-aged sect leader didn't feel oppressed and behaved arrogantly. He was also an Exalted God and both elders that came with him were in the same cultivation realm, making them one of the strongest groups present here.

"S-sect leader... we should not do anything for now." Google search freewebnovel.com

One of the elders was feeling apprehensive and didn't want to cause trouble so soon. They brought a good team with them but the probability of them winning was honestly low, or so he thought.

Not only Arthur and Lucy were individually terrifying, they were backed by King Isadore and also the Kang Clan. Trying to provoke them will only lead to misfortune.

"Hahaha pardon my lateness."

The old man that came with Kang Amidel, sat next to Isadore and coughed while apologizing to the hosts of the tournament. He was a kind old man and showcased his goodwill in several ways.

It's the first time Arthur saw him, though Lucy did speak of him. The Kang Clan were supporting the MoonStar sect and did their best to promote this tournament to further increase the influence of MoonStar.

"It's alright. A please to meet you, Elder Nord."

Arthur politely greeted the elder and kindly waved for him to sit.

"What do you think?"

Lucy telepathically spoke to Arthur seconds after Nord's arrival.

"He's strong... stronger than the rest. I do agree that his arrival here is not just for the tournament."

"On several occasions, he wanted to privately talk to me concerning a sensitive matter but I declined. I thought that we should both be present to hear what he has to say."

"Sure, we'll do it after the tournament."

After a brief silence, Lucy spoke again, "Arthur, don't you think the stance of the Kang Clan is suspicious?"

"It definitely is. They are supporting us a lot... even if it's because of Astria, it's still strange."

"Could they be plotting something? Maybe we should take precautions."-Lucy

"Oh, don't worry about that. I already prepared myself for the worst scenario. In anycase, no one can wreak havoc here, not with you and I here and the formations in place."

Chapter 704 **The Bridge**

In total, there were 51 participants composed of 6 races; Humans, Demons, Mermaids, Dwarves, Elves, and Imoogis. (Imoogi are dragons that resemble snakes (No wings))

The grand opening ceremony was prepared by King Isadore, who spent a lot of effort into inviting famous dancers and renowned bards. The cheering of the crowd was getting louder and the atmosphere was reaching its climax, which warranted the beginning of the first stage.

The main host and the supervisor for the tournament won't be Arthur or Lucy but, surprisingly, Gutcha. The ugly pigolo looked as hideous as ever but after being granted a part of the parasite's Dark Magic, which was highly compatible with him, his cultivation increased by leaps and bounds.

Currently, the pigolo is a 4-star God Monarch and has enough power to contend against peak Overgods. Although at first, Arthur didn't fully trust him, such feelings changed with the passing of time.

The pigolo, albeit slick, was a loyal person deserving of the couple's trust. Not only did he save Saly, he also hid the two intact bodies of Arthur and Lucy in very secretive places, which granted them a second chance even if they died, which they did, by the way.

Gutcha wore a unique robe of the MoonStar Sect. He wasn't officially integrated into the sect, nevertheless, his position is higher than elders. It's equivalent to Sonia's position of Vice-Master.

"You will be teleported to a small dimension where the first stage will take place. Each stage has its rules and anyone who tries to break them or wreak havoc will be immediately disqualified."

As he said that, Gutcha pointed his massive open palm at the participants, and released a mass of Dark Magic.

"Do not resist! This is a precaution."

The Dark Magic invaded all of their bodies, without exception. Some were unhappy while others didn't care at all.

"Let us begin."

Gutcha retrieved a specially-crafted spatial stone in the form of a hexagon. It was embedded with three formations, two of them were meant to transport the participants from here to other dimensions.

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It didn't take long for the preparations to be completed and the 51 participants to appear in the first stage.

They stood at the edge of a large cliff with a strong, whistling gale and an unsteady and creaking bridge which stretched for two to three hundred meters. The bridge connected two cliffs but it was in very bad condition and continuously shaking, almost about to fall.

"In the first stage, you need to individually cross the bridge. Each one of you has a maximum of three minutes and the less time it takes you, the more points you will get."

Gutcha also appeared beside them and briefly explained things before clapping his hands and displaying a disgusting grin on his frightening face.

"First one; Cosima of the Demonic Team."

The pigolo waved his hand, pulling the girl closer to the bridge, then stepping back and motioning for her to begin.

"Isn't it too simple?"

Isadore looked at the unsteady bridge then asked the silent Arthur.

"Is it?"

"Of course! They can just fly and-"

Before he could finish talking, the king saw Cosima try to fly over the bridge only for her body to plummet and crash into the ground. Fortunately for her, she safely landed back on her feet but the increasing gravity made her softly groan.

"Did you really think I would go easy and create an easy first stage? I poured my heart and soul into all the stages and not everyone can pass the bridge."

Isadore wryly laughed then glanced at the sheathed black blade.

"Those gales... are they?"

"You have keen eyes, your majesty."

"Isn't that a bit of an overkill?!"

"I only used a bit, don't worry."

"Isn't this a bit shallow? I expected something grand."

The woman accompanying Cardinal Patrick looked at the wooden bridge and sighed, clearly not impressed.

Contrary to her, the old Cardinal was frowning.

"It's not as simple as that."

He cleared his throat, briefly paused before explaining,

"Believe it or not, that whistling wind can cut you into pieces... I assume he toned it down."

The Demonic Team only had two members, both girls. Cosima and Marjory, and it goes without saying that they're both exceptional, in terms of beauty and prowess.

For even Isadore to think that they could win the tournament already proved how powerful these two young girls really are.

Nevertheless, Cosima was startled as the gravity pulled her downward with an unstoppable force. She immediately realized that flying isn't possible so she tentatively stepped into the bridge and after crossing less than ten meters, she saw incoming projectiles.

They were thumb-sized black metallic balls that flew with high-velocity. Cosima had no problem dodging the first couple of ones but the more distance she crossed, the more projectiles shot at her.

By the time she crossed half the distance, hundreds of those metal balls were coming from the front. The bridge was narrow and unsteady so it became difficult to dodge everything.

In the end, Cosima used her demonic, which she didn't expect to use at the very first stage. Her eyes glowed with crimson radiance then she literally shot beams of light that pulverized all the projectiles incoming at her.

2 minutes 2 seconds, that's how much time it took Cosima to reach the other cliff. She didn't seem that tired but she looked unhappy as was forced to resort to her demonic powers so early.

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After Cosima successfully completed the first stage, her comrade, Marjory, was next. Unlike her friend, Marjory was nimble and was pretty agile, managing to reach the end within 100 seconds.

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A bit less than an hour later, all the teams, except Arthur's, tried their luck in the first stage. Unexpectedly, everyone succeeded, which proved how talented and capable these youngsters are.

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"I will make it so that you'll be the last team to pass the first stage but, in return, I want each and every one of you to show me good results."

A few days ago, Arthur said that to the six disciples, who dropped their heads, unable to refute or argue back.

"If one of you betrays my expectations then... be prepared for a True beating. Am I understood?"

"Yes, teacher!"

The six replied in unison then got back to training.

"Next, Rosea of the MoonStar Team."

The purple-haired girl nervously stepped to the front. She didn't look that confident as her movements were brimming with hesitation. However, when remembered the punishment she'll receive if she fails or does badly, she hardened her will.

With a half-determined expression, the princess of the Magical Cherry Kingdom walked on the bridge without invoking her powers. When the projectiles started coming at her, she dodged them with absolute ease, which even surprised her.

In comparison to Lucy's absurd speed, the metallic balls were nothing at all. Only when she experienced this herself did she realize how great she became.

So, like that, Rosea reached the end of the bridge within 95 seconds. It wasn't the best time, paling in comparison to a youth named John.

This John was a peculiar youth with mysterious description. He is the only member of the Ancient Federation Team.

Speaking of the Ancient Federation, it's actually a monstrous but neutral and non-aggressive power South of Cloud Sea, right at the border. As it is situated so close to the stretching Void, not many cultivators visit it, however, the federation has countless resources and strong individuals working for it.

It's definitely a power worth befriending and that's what Arthur planned to do. He didn't expect them to join this tournament and send an exceptional young man like John.

Chapter 705 **Doors and Numbers**

Although Rosea didn't not beat John's record, she passed the bridge with relative ease, unlike some of the other participants. She didn't even resort to her powers or use Nether Energy, it was a pure display of her physical capabilities.

Right after her was the aloof Cristina, with her black spear in hand, she recklessly charged head-on, sweeping her weapon horizontally and deflecting all incoming projectiles.

Her speed was commendable but she underestimated the miniature metallic balls and was slowed down at the very end. By the time she reached the other side of the bridge, 97 seconds passed.

When her time was announced by pigolo, the girl unhappily harrumphed and glared at Rosea, who was widely grinning, pleased that she beat her new rival.

The third one was Ho Qing, who didn't not struggle at all. Two large phoenix wings appeared on his back, allowing him to jump high and glide a considerable distance but the balls were still aimed at him. His time was worse than his two predecessors, nonetheless, he seemed content as he nodded his head once and went to stand next to the two bickering girls.

Shu Ru and Arden did it in 94 seconds but, unexpectedly, Bora managed to stun the audience as well as his own teachers, Arthur and Lucy.

The Archer's speed was incredible as he slipped through the tiny gaps between the balls' trajectory and easily arrived at the end in just 79 seconds, beating John's record of 83 seconds.

"Bora of the MoonStar sect, 79 seconds. 43 points."

Actually, the way the points were attributed was based on the difference between the highest and lowest individual scores.

Cosima from the Demonic Team was the slowest, taking 122 seconds, whilst Bora's was 79 so... $122 - 79 = 43$.

The closer your time is to Cosima's, the less points you are, basically. Moreover, as the worst one of the bunch, the demon girl got only one pitiful point.

"I didn't know that kid had it in him."

Seeing the proud and cheerful smile on Bora's face, Lucy chuckled and spoke words that seemed like a compliment. Even Arthur was pleased but he chose not to comment, after all, the first test is the easiest and it tests Agility and reflexes.

"Color me impressed."

Isadore was rubbing his chin and looking at the MoonStar team, seemingly lost in thought.

"Don't forget our bet, your majesty."

"About that..."

The young golden-haired king faked a few coughs and avoided Arthur's gaze.

"Nevermind..."

"Welcome to the second stage."

Gutcha had an ugly smile on his hideous face, enjoying the puzzled looks on the participants' face. They were teleported again, this time appearing in an area filled with swamps with all shapes and sizes.

"For the second stage, the goal is to escape this place. Each team will be given a number from 1 to 12 and there are 10 numbered doors, which are, 15(5+10), 17(6+11), 6(2+4), 16(9+7), 20(8+12), 8(1+7), 12(10+2), 14(9+5), 3(1+2), 23(11+12), and they are the combination of two specific numbers that will be in possession of the teams. Meaning, you need your number plus another appropriate one to open one of the doors. Note that only the team that opens the door can pass through it and when it has been used, it'll disappear. Additionally, a door can be opened by only two numbers, no more, no less. Good luck!"

Just as he finished explaining the rules, Gutcha activated a device in his hand, causing the twelve teams to be enveloped in a white light then vanishing, each randomly teleported to an area of the stage.

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Rosea and co appeared near a very small swamp, they were surrounded by strangely bent trees. They could hear the croaking of several frogs and barely audible roars of faraway monsters.

"What's our number?"

Cristina frowned and looked at her teammates. At first, they were confused but, soon enough, a giant silver card that was thrice their size descended from above and kept hovering a couple of meters away from their heads.

The card had the number 9 engraved on it.

"It's 9... which means we can either enter door 14 or 16." Shu Ru gazed at the silver card and commented.

"So, what's the plan? Do we separate and look for the team that has number 7 or 5?"

The spear-wielding black-haired girl was pumped, holding her weapon in hand. In response, her friend, Bora, shook his head and, while carefully choosing his words, said,

"It's better to stay together. This is a team competition and if one of us gets caught alone, it'll only decrease our chances of winning."

"Wait, if we separate, the card follows who?"

All curious about this, they distanced themselves from each other and noticed that the silver card was drifting slowly to Bora's direction.

"It must be because he got the best score in the last stage." remarked Shu Ru.

"Alright, it's decided that we'll stay together, right?"-Bora

The other five nodded their heads in agreement. They chose one random direction and started walking, their guards-up.

They did not know how big this swampy area is but, considering that they soon started hearing explosions and fighting noises, it shouldn't be that big.

In this stage, it's definitely advantageous to have a team composed of many members, and it was done by purpose. Just like there are stages that favor numerical advantage, there others which the smaller your team is, the better. .Google search freewebovel.com

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After ten minutes of walking, the MoonStar team stumbled upon their first enemies. A group of five bald youth wearing brown and yellow long robes were circling a swamp and carefully tapping the water.

Above them, there was also a silver card with the number 1 on it, which means that Cristina and the rest need not waste time or energy battling with the Buddha Team.

"Let's make a detour." Proposed Ardor as he retracted his gaze from the group of bald youths. They took the opposite direction and were about to leave but one of them raised his hand.

"Wait."

Ho Qing, who rarely talks, motioned them to stop before pointing at an area on the other side of the swamp, right in-between the cluster of strange trees.

There, he spotted short silhouettes peeking from the trees. It was hard to hear what they were whispering to each other but, it was clear that they were dwarves.

Doors and Numbers

Although Rosea didn't not beat John's record, she passed the bridge with relative ease, unlike some of the other participants. She didn't even resort to her powers or use Nether Energy, it was a pure display of her physical capabilities.

Right after her was the aloof Cristina, with her black spear in hand, she recklessly charged head-on, sweeping her weapon horizontally and deflecting all incoming projectiles.

Her speed was commendable but she underestimated the miniature metallic balls and was slowed down at the very end. By the time she reached the other side of the bridge, 97 seconds passed.

When her time was announced by pigolo, the girl unhappily harrumphed and glared at Rosea, who was widely grinning, pleased that she beat her new rival.

The third one was Ho Qing, who didn't not struggle at all. Two large phoenix wings appeared on his back, allowing him to jump high and glide a considerable distance but the balls were still aimed at him. His time was worse than his two predecessors, nonetheless, he seemed content as he nodded his head once and went to stand next to the two bickering girls.

Shu Ru and Arden did it in 94 seconds but, unexpectedly, Bora managed to stun the audience as well as his own teachers, Arthur and Lucy.

The Archer's speed was incredible as he slipped through the tiny gaps between the balls' trajectory and easily arrived at the end in just 79 seconds, beating John's record of 83 seconds.

"Bora of the MoonStar sect, 79 seconds. 43 points."

Actually, the way the points were attributed was based on the difference between the highest and lowest individual scores.

Cosima from the Demonic Team was the slowest, taking 122 seconds, whilst Bora's was 79 so... $122 - 79 = 43$.

The closer your time is to Cosima's, the less points you are, basically. Moreover, as the worst one of the bunch, the demon girl got only one pitiful point.

"I didn't know that kid had it in him."

Seeing the proud and cheerful smile on Bora's face, Lucy chuckled and spoke words that seemed like a compliment. Even Arthur was pleased but he chose not to comment, after all, the first test is the easiest and it tests Agility and reflexes.

"Color me impressed."

Isadore was rubbing his chin and looking at the MoonStar team, seemingly lost in thought.

"Don't forget our bet, your majesty."

"About that..."

The young golden-haired king faked a few coughs and avoided Arthur's gaze.

"Nevermind..."

"Welcome to the second stage."

Gutcha had an ugly smile on his hideous face, enjoying the puzzled looks on the participants' face. They were teleported again, this time appearing in an area filled with swamps with all shapes and sizes.

"For the second stage, the goal is to escape this place. Each team will be given a number from 1 to 12 and there are 10 numbered doors, which are, 15(5+10), 17(6+11), 6(2+4), 16(9+7), 20(8+12), 8(1+7), 12(10+2), 14(9+5), 3(1+2), 23(11+12), and they are the combination of two specific numbers that will be in possession of the teams. Meaning, you need your number plus another appropriate one to open one

of the doors. Note that only the team that opens the door can pass through it and when it has been used, it'll disappear. Additionally, a door can be opened by only two numbers, no more, no less. Good luck!"

Just as he finished explaining the rules, Gutcha activated a device in his hand, causing the twelve teams to be enveloped in a white light then vanishing, each randomly teleported to an area of the stage.

...

Rosea and co appeared near a very small swamp, they were surrounded by strangely bent trees. They could hear the croaking of several frogs and barely audible roars of faraway monsters.

"What's our number?"

Cristina frowned and looked at her teammates. At first, they were confused but, soon enough, a giant silver card that was thrice their size descended from above and kept hovering a couple of meters away from their heads.

The card had the number 9 engraved on it.

"It's 9... which means we can either enter door 14 or 16." Shu Ru gazed at the silver card and commented.

"So, what's the plan? Do we separate and look for the team that has number 7 or 5?"

The spear-wielding black-haired girl was pumped, holding her weapon in hand. In response, her friend, Bora, shook his head and, while carefully choosing his words, said,

"It's better to stay together. This is a team competition and if one of us gets caught alone, it'll only decrease our chances of winning."

"Wait, if we separate, the card follows who?"

All curious about this, they distanced themselves from each other and noticed that the silver card was drifting slowly to Bora's direction.

"It must be because he got the best score in the last stage." remarked Shu Ru.

"Alright, it's decided that we'll stay together, right?"-Bora

The other five nodded their heads in agreement. They chose one random direction and started walking, their guards-up.

They did not know how big this swampy area is but, considering that they soon started hearing explosions and fighting noises, it shouldn't be that big.

In this stage, it's definitely advantageous to have a team composed of many members, and it was done by purpose. Just like there are stages that favor numerical advantage, there others which the smaller your team is, the better.

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...

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There, he spotted short silhouettes peeking from the trees. It was hard to hear what they were whispering to each other but, it was clear that they were dwarves.

Chapter 707: He's here, at last

Shu Ru and co did not have enough time to debate and come to a decision. The fight between the three dwarves and the young monks was heating up and if they don't use this opportunity to launch an ambush, another team surely will.

"Our targets are the dwarves so let us not unnecessarily fight the Buddha team. We must execute this swiftly then leave or else we'll become their primary target."

Ardor voiced his thoughts while grabbing his sword, ready to engage. Cristina, Ho Qing, and Bora all did the same while Rosea and Shu Ru opted to remain at the back in case other participants decide to do something.

"Bora, can you hit the dwarf with the number over his head?"

"Definitely."

"Then, on my mark, you shoot."

Ardor raised his hand, his eyes fixated on the Dodir, the dwarf wielding two one-handed black axes. He was simultaneously battling two monks, his Godspirit manifesting itself above his head and unleashing roars that split the ground and periodically protected him.

"Ready..."

Two bald young monks attack from the left and right of Dodir, their wooden staffs sweeping horizontally. The short and bearded Dodir spun around, unleashing a burst of black aura.

"Shoot!"

When Ardor dropped his hand, signaling his friend, Bora, who had ample time to prepare, shot an arrow fully made of silver material. The strings of the greatbow shook intensely just as the projectile was shot.

The arrow traveled at a high-velocity, emitting no sound whatsoever and, in just a breath, it hit its target, going through Dodir's shoulder and blowing him dozens of meters away.

Right at the same time, both Cristina and Ardor showed themselves. The former leaping high-up in the air then, with her spear pointed downwards, descended on the injured dwarf like a dragon. As for Ardor, he wasn't as flashy as his teammate, but he was definitely faster.

He moved with a commendable speed, his figure blurring like a phantom. A well-condensed arc of sword essence shot from his sword, hitting Gradir, the mace-wielding dwarf.

Upon seeing his companion get ambushed, Gradir leapt away from the monks, wanting to provide assistance, however, he was blocked by Ardor. Just like Dodir, Gradir invoked his Godspirit, which actually was a gigantic crimson warhorn that released a deep, whale-like sound.

The dwarf and Ardor clashed with each other, causing violent shockwaves and even pushing the swamp waters away.

Last but not least, Ho Qing rose into the air, a phoenix cry echoed before a wave of flames hit the Buddha team and Dodir. Without any hesitation, the red-haired youth rushed at the fallen dwarf and touched the number above his head, making it instantly change owners.

However, though the acquisition of the number was smooth, the battle was far from over. Sandir, the hidden bow-wielding dwarf shoots a rain of arrows, aimed at none but Ho Qing, though before they could hit him, a wall of crystalline pink ice surged from the ground.

The wall blocked some of the arrows but was eventually destroyed, not by Sandir's arrows but a large illusory golden silhouette.

One of the monks, a youth with green eyes, showed his Godspirit and attacked Ho Qing. The Godspirit had eight golden arms and was sitting cross-legged like Buddha. Its hand moved at a speed that none of the people participating could fathom.

Apart from the first hit, which was blocked by Rosea's ice, Ho Qing wasn't able to block the rest, his body was crushed under the mountainous force of the golden palms.

He was all-bloody and clearly not fit to fight anymore so the green-eyed bald monk stopped his bombardment and, with one step, appeared next to Ho Qing.

Just as he was about to touch the number '7', there was an abrupt explosion that filled his vision with orange flames. A flaming fist struck the monk's chest, sending him flying like a kite, leaving a trail of blood behind.

"Too careless."

Although, from anyone's point of view, the ambush of the MoonStar team was successful. Arthur wasn't pleased with his disciples cooperations. They seem to be doing well and helping each other but it still isn't enough, at least not for him.

"Give them a break. They can do it."

Lucy softly smiled and nodded her head, approving of the six youngsters.

"I'm not saying they won't. Just that they can do better."

"Oh, Arthur, come on! Your team already caught the attention of everyone. I mean, just look at those phoenix flames... I did not know that young man had Phoenix blood in him."

Isadore Malfront chuckled, his eyes gleaming with excitement as they reflected the sea of flames that spread around Ho Qing.

The four monks surrounded their wounded friend, raised their staff above their heads and mumbled incomprehensible gibberish. Within a couple of breaths, the ground started shaking then it split open, revealing a bottomless ravine from which a beast-like creature showed itself.

A distance away, Ardor managed to overpower the dwarf, going as far as slicing his mace in half, however, the dwarf didn't seem to mind as he took out a brand new one with an identical appearance and aura.

Ho Qing, with the support of Bora, who repeatedly shot his arrows, successfully backed away from the battle area. Obviously, it was high time for them to retreat, were it not for Cristina's stubbornness, which, unsurprisingly, complicated things.

The arrogant girl, after having her attack blocked by the monks, refused to leave before retaliating appropriately. She tightly held the black spear and, like a bullet, shot at the golden and massive beast.

The relatively minuscule girl clashed with the beast, her spear piercing its body and causing it to angrily roar and shake.

Admittedly powerful, Cristina's recklessness caused her to fall into the ambush of another team.

A black fog filled her view before three shadows shot from the nearby cluster of trees. The girl pulled her spear from the beast and stabbed it on the ground while using it to support herself and spin around, kicking all three assailants at the same time.

They were weaker than her and just her kicks made them stagger to the back, however, the golden beast summoned by the monks did not sit still. It disregarded the black fog and crashed into the unprepared Cristina, blowing her all the way to the swamp.

Fortunately, Rosea turned the water into ice so Cristina ended up rolling over a dozen times before laying there, seemingly unconscious.

Upon a closer view, the unknown attackers turned out to be the Dark Blade Team. Seeing the beast block them from reaching Cristina, they shifted their attention to the closest MoonStar Team member, Ardor.

The youth was busy fighting Gradir but when Cristina's assailants charged at him, he somersaulted and slashed the air multiple times. Several white bursts of lights fell from above, precisely around the three participants.

Surprisingly, Ardor's technique wasn't an offensive one, it was only meant to trap them for a short time. The one who finished them off was Rosea, who literally dropped a massive boulder made of pink ice right at them.

In a futile attempt to destroy it, the three youngsters unleashed their techniques but the boulder was just too resistant.

In the end, they were knocked unconscious and their bodies were wrapped by dark flames, signaling that they were officially out of the competition.

Arthur, who was quietly watching the unfolding events, suddenly twitched and looked East. He felt a domineering yet familiar presence closing in on the city.

It wasn't only him who felt this, Lucy also followed his gaze, a cold smile forming on her face.

"You are finally here but... why do I sense a woman close to you? She has your imprint too."

Arthur faked a few coughs and dared not meet her gaze, he just inwardly cursed his copy, who was foolish enough to bring a woman with him.

Chapter 708: Unforgotten Memories

Author's note: First of all, I apologize for the long wait but I promise you I'm back for good and there will be daily updates starting from today. I will post a short summary of what happened previously in case some of you forgot.

...

There was a discernable and tense atmosphere flowing in the air. The riled crowd watching the competition seemed to have been quietened as the real Arthur and the clone stared at each other but opted to maintain their silence, both fearful of Lucy's reaction.

'Damned idiot! How could you bring a woman?!'

As someone with the same opinions, thoughts, and beliefs as him, Arthur's clone should know better than to bring a woman in here. To make matters worse, the woman was a succubus and had his imprint, making the two Arthurs shrink down, their bodies stiff.

In order to save his skin, the clone stood there for a couple of seconds before disappearing, all his memories and the skills he gained transferred to the original

'You bastard! You cause a mess then expect me to take care of it?!'

Arthur vainly cursed the clone in his mind, though that changed of the fact that he'll be the one providing an explanation.

As the influx of memories hammered his mind, his vision blackened for a couple of breaths. The vivid images of all that happened, whether it's the prison break, the matter with Zaarae, the shapeshifter, the Fallen God Clan, and, especially, the Garden of Words and Shen Shen.

Lucy's eyes were narrowed, glaring at the smiling Fariya, as if she wanted to eat her alive. When she glanced at her husband, clearly demanding answers, she was surprised to see him tearing up.

He was staring to the front, a single tear trickling down his cheek. At first, Lucy thought he's acting in order to lessen her anger, however, he had a genuine expression of sadness and relief.

Out of nowhere, the parasite stretched his arms and pulled her into his arms, tightly hugging her while whispering.

"Lucy... our daughter is alive. She didn't die... she didn't die..."

It took her a few moments to process what happened, but since she didn't see what he saw, she was confused and surprised. She hugged him and buried her face in his chest, softly smiling while controlling her welling emotions.

It wasn't the time or place to have such a sensitive conversation, and both the parasite and the white specter knew that, therefore, they left the area shortly after their hug separated.

Of course, Fariya followed after them but didn't dare to say anything. She acted as a proper servant and flew behind the couple, her interest soon shifting to the competition and the dozens of strong auras emanating from the plateau.

...

The competition was still ongoing but Arthur had a more important matter to discuss with Lucy, privately. Fariya was ordered to stay outside, while the couple entered the bedroom, in which Arthur told his wife about everything, not missing a single detail.

It took the couple a great deal of time to digest everything, especially the part regarding Shen Shen and her disappearance. Lucy wasn't a crybaby but as she got learned the truth, she was bawling for a long time, happy that her child survived but saddened over what happened.

She didn't blame Arthur, it wasn't his fault for he didn't know she was his at that time. However, now, they have yet one more motive to break from the cycles. The Garden of Words told Arthur that it'll answer more of his questions were he to break free from the shackles of time that are currently binding him and his two brothers.

The Garden of Words provided the parasite with five methods, with one of them being more difficult than the rest.

One is possessing every lifeform he comes across for approximately three years, which, in return, will make him grow infinitely stronger, to the point of reaching the apex of physical and magical power. Either it's the highest level recorded in the system, or the peak of cultivation, also known as, the Transcendent Mortal Realm.

This method could be considered easy, however, it is mind-numbing and may result in permanent side effects on his mind. With his current condition, which is definitely not alright, choosing this method will only complicate things and perhaps even force him into an unwanted path of blood and murder.

The second method is absolute non-interference, just continue repeating the cycles until they are systematically removed by the Space-Time Continuum.

...

Arthur recounted every letter spoken by the Garden then discussed their choices with Lucy. They spent the whole night talking about what transpired, about Shen Shen, how she looks and sounds, etc...

The couple seemed to have forgotten about the competition, no longer paying it any heed.

Amongst the arsenal of skills in Arthur's possession, there were ones that turn some memories into vivid projections.

[Unforgotten Memories] is such a skill, allowing Arthur to show Lucy how Shen Shen looked and acted.

At the sight of the lovely and rebellious blue-haired girl, Lucy cried even more, unable to contain her emotions.

He held her in his arms and the two quietly watched the images, one by one, for hours on end.

By the time the sun rose, Lucy had calmed down though her face was reddened and her eyes a bit swollen from all the bawling. She was combing her long silver hair and looking at the pondering Arthur.

"What method should we choose?"

"I still don't know. I need to retrieve the last clone first... he hasn't come back yet which means Astria isn't faring well. We may need to go there."

"Alright. We can go whenever you want."

The man stood up and walked toward his wife, took the comb from her hair, and proceeded to continue the simple job, being as gentle as possible.

"We have become stronger... but we need just a bit more. Just a bit to break free and live life how we pictured it."

...

Updated Status Window.

TITLE: MEAT GRINDER / SEEKER OF KNOWLEDGE / ONE WITH THE SWORD / ARK HOLDER / LIVE WITH HONOR, DIE WITH GLORY / BREAKER OF CHAINS / HOLDER OF THE DARK BLADE'S OATH / MAD DESTROYER/PSYCHOPATH/Dragon Rider / UNSEEN BOND / ONE STALKED BY THE REAPER / DIVINE HERALD / THE EMPRESS' SWEETHEART / THE LORD OF PARASITES / SLAVE MASTER

Level: ??

Class: Dark ARK Parasite

Realm: Overgod (Formation[Peak])

Celestial Body: 31%

-

Strength: 49.9B

Intelligence: 51B

Agility: 53B

Wisdom: 36B

Vitality: 52.1B

Dexterity: 33.3B

-

Health: 70B// Health Regen: 43.1m/s

Nether Energy: 22B // Nether Energy Regen: 26.4m/s(+100%)

Mana: 15.9B / Mana Regen: 30.1m/s

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Stamina: Infinite /Stamina Regen: ???

Creation: 1050

Attack: 46.8B (+35% damage [Dark Flame Ring]) (+20% if Dark Magic is used) (+5% [Warrior's Cry][LvMax](Passive)) [+2% from Breaker of Chains Title]

Defense: 50.5B(+25% Damage Reduction) (+5% [Solid [LvMax](passive)]) (+10% [Golem's Wall(LvMax)(Passive)])

Magic Defense: 6B

Soul Defense: 29m

Enigma abilities : Thought and Effect / [Light Operation/ Righteous Death] / Sixth sense /

-

Mental Power: 46805

Elemental Resistances(+)

Fire: 100%

Darkness: 100%

Wind: 35%

Water: 75%

Earth: 75%
Light/holy: 65%
Shadow: 30(+20%)%
Lightning: 100%
Ice: 30%
Death : 19.9%
Crowd Control : 50%
Life: 19.9%

Possessions (472,129)

Races:

Divine Beasts (4)
Humans (283,086)
Demons (84,991)
Beasts (+)(101,529)
Unique Beasts (2511)
Mythical beings (1)

•

Chapter 709 Thank You

"Leave us alone for a bit."

Last night, Arthur somehow explained Fariya's situation to Lucy. Back then, Lucy was too preoccupied with other, more relevant news, so she didn't question him longer than necessary. However, when the sun had risen and they left their room, the half-n.a.k.e.d succubus was standing outside, like any dutiful slave.

Her eyelashes flapped, a seductive smile appearing on her face as she lightly bowed her head to the couple. The parasite grimaced, not knowing how to react, but his wife, Lucy, coldly snorted and stepped forward.

She uttered those words then approached the clearly unafraid succubus. Unwilling to be present for what's about to happen, Arthur excused himself, soundlessly backing away, not even trying to eavesdrop.

Left alone for a while, Arthur had time to converse with Midolf and Radolf, as well as the Quad-Spirit.

"Congratulations on retrieving Makaze back, master."-Radolf

"Yes yes! gratz!"-Midolf

The Dark Blade, its hilt now slightly changed in terms of appearance, emitted an unseen but deadly aura, akin to wind vibrations, capable of cutting anything in their way.

Now that the clone was integrated back into the original host, Arthur received a bunch of new skills, but the notable ones are the Sand skills, and [Thought of Effect], which is the upgraded Telekinesis ability the clone had gotten in the prison.

Despite not reaching the Exalted God Realm, Arthur was more than confident in being able to defeat and even kill any Exalted God, no matter who it is. Makaze is as strong as a Zen Treasure, and there are also the two Mythical Beings hiding inside of him, as well as the Quad-Spirit, which is a self-sentient entity known only to a few people.

Amongst the extinguished individuals that graced him with their presence, none can threaten him, even if they threw a timely ambush. The formation he put beforehand will make sure there is no disturbance throughout the competition.

There is also Lucy by his side... she's a strong cultivator and an opponent that even he would find difficult to overpower.

Basically, it could be said that he reached a praiseworthy level of power, allowing him to protect himself, his family, and his friends. All that is left is to peacefully finish the competition then head to Astria and see what's going on.

The last clone may return before they depart, which could be nothing but a good sign and a step toward a better future. He still hasn't decided which method he's going to use but it would be a lie to say he's not inclined toward a

particular one; the one involving the Zen treasure located in the System Universe.

"I reckon the madam will tear the succubus apart, what do you think, master?"

Midolf snickered, the mere thought of seeing the Succubus get owned made him exhilarated. Arthur, however, didn't feel the time, he shuddered and shook his head, trying to purge all the bad thoughts.

"I don't know and don't care. I'm not responsible for my clone's actions."

"But your clone is you, is it not?"- curiously asked the Quad-Spirit.

"It's different. I wouldn't make a slave out of a succubus... or travel along with the Empress."

"But you did... I'm starting to feel bad for you, master. I'll pray for your safety."- Midolf.

"Shut it, will you."

"Yes master. Sorry, master." Robotically replied Midolf, barely holding back his laughter. Were it not for Radolf, the wiser one, who rebuked him, he'd have continued acting like that and enjoying his master's critical situation.

Thankfully, the clone did not engage in any a.d.u.l.tery and hardly touched any woman, which greatly lessened the consequences and perhaps even minimized Lucy's anger and jealousy.

In any way, the best he could do is apologize and accept whatever is going to happen, that's what any loyal and loving husband would do after a screw-up.

...

The woman was busy writing something, her office smelled like old paper and wood, but it felt cozy and warm. Her focus was disturbed by three light knocks on the door, making her raise her head and softly say

"Yes, come in."

"I hope I'm not interrupting you." Said the man while chuckling.

"Not at all."

Arthur walked forward, sitting opposite Sonia, who has grown since their first meeting.

Back then, although the principal of the Nemia magic Academy, she was too emotional and did many wrong things. Now, on the other hand, she seemed to have become more responsible and wiser.

She went through many tragedies, especially the disappearance of Anastassia, her own sister, and only family.

Still, she has Maria, Robin, Rey, and the others by her side. Their support helped her greatly and made her what she is today... someone fit to be the Vice-master of the MoonStar sect.

In the couple's absence, she was the one who managed this city, made it prosper, and recruited appropriate disciples from all over the globe. She took care of the political and financial part of the sect, and though she's a mage, she still looks tired all the time, with large black circles under her eyes.

Thanks to the elixirs and skill books and cultivation scriptures Arthur had previously handed to her, Sonia was able to reach the Immortal Realm, further extending her lifespan and making her stronger. However, she wasn't interested in power for she found joy in managing the sect and doing what she's best at.

"We've not had much time to talk you and I.," Said Arthur, his hand raised ever-so-slightly, casting an effective healing spell that restored some color to the woman's face.

"Well, we don't have much to talk about, right?"

Sonia put down the pen and gave a faint smile, her back slumping back on the comfortable and large chair she was sitting on.

"I saw a woman standing by your bedroom. Did one of the clones return?"

"Yes, he did... and unfortunately brought with him a slave succubus. Lucy and she are currently talking."

"So you came to me for advice? You do know that I'm still single and bad with matters concerning romance, yes?"

Upon seeing the odd and helpless expression on the man's face, Sonia giggled, finding it comical to see a tough and ruthless man such as Arthur behave like this.

"I guess it is true that all men are afraid of their wives."

"Honestly, it's not my fault."

"Yes yes, that's what they all say."

"But it isn't though. It was the clone who messed up. I was with Lucy the whole time."

"Then try telling her that." Sonia said, her laughter never stopping..

"You can't. Lucy is just too overprotective of you, always getting jealous. It's not a bad thing, you know. I sometimes envy you guys."

"Really? I thought you're not interested in marriage and love."

"All women yearn for love but it's just not for everyone."

Sonia sighed and looked outside of the window, which was on her right. Her gaze fell on the plateau, which was starting to fill up as the competition was resuming after a good night's rest.

"I'm sure that, if you look, you'll find a man suitable for you."

"No thanks, I have my job and I am more than satisfied with it. Maybe in the future."

"Sure, but if there's a man you fancy then tell me right away. I'll drag him to your doorstep if necessary."

"Hehe thanks, Arthur."

After a short bout of silence, in which both looked at the plateau, Sonia spoke again.

"Thank you. For everything."

"You don't need to thank me. You're part of the family."

"After what I did to you and Lucy... I tried to kill you two yet you saved me countless times. You saved the Clan and gave us refuge. I owe you guys my life."

"There's no need to be so dramatic. We did what's right. You, your sister, your clan... you're good people, deserving of a good life. I believe that we helped each other, through thick and thin, up until this moment, and hopefully in the future too."

"Yes. Thank you again."

"Okay, now you seriously have to stop thanking me."

Arthur laughed and stood up, waving his hand at Sonia as he left the office.

Chapter 710 -: Third Trial

After briefly talking with Sonia, Arthur met back with Lucy and Fariya. The two women talked for a little while and, unlike before, the succubus was acting more reserved. Even her clothes were changed into more appropriate, less-revealing ones. She was standing behind Lucy, her whole demeanor radically changed and the smile that was constantly on her face was nowhere to be seen.

"Let's go back to the plateau. It's about time the 3rd Trial begins."

Arthur voiced no objection, he nodded his head and walked beside his wife. As for Fariya, she maintained a distance of five meters, keeping quiet and not even looking at the Parasite.

'What did you tell her?'

The husband telepathically talked to his wife, who inwardly snorted.

'Nothing that should concern you, my dear husband.'

The succubus looked unharmed but the sudden and big change in character made Arthur promise himself not to get involved with other women, no matter the circumstances. Fortunately, Lucy's jealousy and anger weren't directed at him, or else he'd have been shunned for a couple of days, if not weeks.

It didn't take long for the couple to reach the plateau, where the remaining 10 teams were getting ready for the next trial.

As he expected, Arthur and Lucy's team was successful in acquiring the required number and were able to safely pass the door without losing a single member.

Although 10 teams were qualified, there have been a few participants disqualified, like the three from the Dark Blaze Team. Surprisingly, however, the last member of the Dark Blaze Team was able to get the needed number and pass the door, thanks to nothing but sheer luck.

The two teams which lost were the Buddha Team and the Eternal Rouge Team. The latter is to be expected, as its members weren't particularly strong and barely garnered any attention. The Buddha Team, on the other hand, was a surprise to almost everyone, including Arthur and Lucy.

The team of bald young men, all wielding the same weapon and wearing the same outfit, were defeated by a joint attack of three other teams, including the MoonStar Team.

Even with their peculiar praying techniques and the golden beast they had summoned, the five young monks were defeated. They got cornered, their number stolen and forced to fight for a long while, till their very last breath.

This brought the remaining number of participants from 51 to 38. Three of the four members of the Dark Blaze Team were out, two from the nine mermaid team, and the rest were all the members of the Eternal Rouge Sect team and the Buddha Team.

"Welcome back!"

Isadore cheerfully greeted the couple, the usual bright smile on his lively face. Though, his gaze soon fell on the approaching succubus, becoming curious and surprised.

He may not be as knowledgeable about the couple as Sonia or those close to them, nonetheless, the fact that Lucy does not tolerate other women close to her husband is already known to many people.

In the end, the mortal King of Green-Leaf swallowed his curiosity and did not ask any unnecessary questions.

"Won't you go talk to your team? Perhaps they need some advice?"

"There is no need. They can manage." Answered Arthur while softly chuckling.

"Really? That reckless girl wielding a spear got seriously injured though. Would it not be better to pull her out of the competition? I doubt one night was enough for her to recuperate."

"..." The parasite offered no response, he kept smiling and looking at the remaining teams. The guardians of each team were having a serious talk with the youngsters, offering pointers and encouraging them.

The only person who stood alone, unperturbed by the unpleasantly loud and energetic crowd, was John, the sole member of the Ancient Federation team.

It's a shame that Arthur did not get to see him in action due to his clone's arrival, nonetheless, he was certain that the youth would pass the trial. Just one look at the results from the appraisal skills were enough for Arthur to know that the young man was an exceptional genius, leagues above his peers. Furthermore, John was the second youngest participant and though it's an unnecessary remark, Arthur had to admit that the boy was handsome, as pretty as an elf.

He had a slightly tanned skin, short brown hair, and a unique pair of golden-colored eyes. He had a simple attire, a black leather jerkin, and tight pants of the same color. Holstered in his waist were blade about half a meter in length, shallow appearance and emitting no aura whatsoever.

As per Arthur's calculations, it's either John, the Imoogi team, or the Holy Dominion Team, who will pose a threat to his team. The rest aren't weak, but they still fall short, making him confident that Ho Qing, Rosea, and the rest, can manage them.

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"Ladies and gentlemen! It's finally time for the 3rd Trial! Esteemed guardians, please return to your seats."

The pigolo displayed an ugly grimace as he motioned for the teams to neatly group before him, which they immediately did. A barely noticeable distance separated every team, each one minding their business and readying themselves.

Gutcha gave a short, unremarkable speech to rile up the crowd even more, then he teleported the teams to where the next trial will be occurring.

The teleportation was instantaneous and the remaining 38 youths found themselves standing in an enormous arena, with a square-like shape made from cubic grey tiles, highly- resistant to Magic and practically impenetrable.

"For the third stage is called 'Boss Fight' and the goal is to try and defeat a randomly chosen monster. Even if you don't succeed in defeating the monster, do not worry, as the damage you've inflicted will be calculated. Each team will be given five minutes and a participant is knocked unconscious or gets seriously injured, he or she will be out. If the entirety of the team is out, it will be considered as a failure; immediate disqualification."

"It's a simple test. Keep in mind that killing the monster will be enough to qualify you for the next trial and give the maximum amount of points, which is 100. Good luck to all of you."

Gutcha enthusiastically clapped his hands, signaling the beginning of the trial. He fished out a wheel twice his size from the storage ring, put the large object before him and beckoned to the MoonStar Team.

"The order of the teams will be the opposite of the one in the first stage. Each team will spin the wheel and whatever the arrows points at will be the monster said team will face. Understood?"