

Strongest Mage with the Lust system

#Chapter 771: 780

'Papa' - Read Strongest Mage with the Lust system

Chapter 771: 'Papa'

Kriss wasn't in the right state of mind after hearing Pauline had harmed her Blood Essence, but he still noticed Max's unnatural expression.

Moreover, when he looked at him, he noticed his face had turned pale as if there was no blood left in his body, which made him frown.

"Are you okay?" He asked,

Max snapped back to his senses upon hearing his voice.

"I'm..." He had just begun speaking when he sensed strong fluctuations in space outside the cave and rushed out, only to witness the space in front of him splitting apart.

Swoosh!

Kriss also arrived beside him and watched the unstable rift open with wide eyes.

"We should le—" Before he could finish his words, a large figure shot out of the rift and crashed into the ground in front of them, the impact creating a crater and causing the cave behind them to collapse.

BOOM!

Kriss' expression changed. Almost instantly, he transformed into a cloud of black mist and entered the cave through rubble, extremely anxious.

Pauline was inside and unconscious. Any heavy enough rock could flatten her to death, which, if happened, he wouldn't be able to forgive himself. This was why, instead of fleeing upon seeing the figure land in front of them that his logical mind told him, he chose to go in to Pauline while desperately hoping she wasn't harmed.

Just like Kriss, Max's mind also screamed at him to flee immediately when he saw the large figure, exuding a suffocating, majestic, and wild aura, appear in front of him.

However, before he could move, he felt a strange sense of familiarity from the figure, which delayed him. Then he noticed Kriss had gone inside the crumbled cave, and since he wouldn't leave without him and Pauline, he disregarded the blaring warnings in his mind and stayed put.

A few moments passed, and the cloud of dust slowly cleared, revealing the hundred-meter-wide crater, at the center of which lay a several-meter-long golden-winged snake covered in numerous bleeding wounds. One of its wings seemed to be crippled as it was deformed in an unnatural way.

The sense of familiarity became stronger when he saw the snake. Then he saw it raise its head a little and look in his direction. For a moment, there was a look of confusion in its large, beady eyes, which then transformed into one of recognition and then jubilation, relief, affection, and lastly complaint.

[Pa...Pa...]

Thud!

Right as this childish voice sounded in Max's head, the large snake head dropped to the ground and its eyes closed.

Max stood there, stunned.

The moment he saw those almost human-like emotions in its eyes as it looked at him, he had realized this snake was the one from the Golden-Winged Python's egg that he had bought in Ninam City and had given the Supreme Mage controlling his system to nurture.

However, after the realization came questions.

Had the supreme mage hatched it before the system killed him? If yes, then why hadn't it been given to him?

If not, how did it hatch on its own? Could it be that however much energy he had put into nurturing it before his death was enough?

How was it able to recognize him? From his bloodline energy's signature? Or from Nascent Energy's?

None of these questions, however, held any immediate importance. The question that was important was why it was so badly injured and whether those who had injured it would come after it?

He already had many problems to deal with and didn't want more. However, the moment he saw those emotions directed at him, whatever fear and hesitation he felt vanished in thin air, and when he heard its childish voice call him Papa, before he even knew, he found himself in front of it, reaching out his hand to touch its scaly head with a look of affection, heartache, and fury in his eyes.

Though these sudden emotions startled him, he didn't resist them. He could feel the subtle but very intimate and strong connection with it.

Raising his head, he glanced at where the rift had closed with murder in his eyes. "I'll kill you all." He declared.

The snake, even in its unconscious state, seemed to feel his emotions and visibly relaxed.

...

Just a few hundred miles from the edge of the human continent, several demons and humans stood in the air, supporting stunned expressions on their faces.

Each of them radiated strong auras of Emperor realm experts, but all of them could do nothing but watch as the unstable spatial rift in front of them slowly closed.

"Can anyone tell me why a magic beast, especially a snake, has spatial abilities?" A human emperor mage asked after the rift closed.

"Heh, as expected of you humans, you know nothing." A man, dressed in elegant white robes with a purple horn on his forehead, scoffed mockingly. He was a demon, but if someone didn't see the horn, they wouldn't be able to tell him apart from a human.

"Oh, so you know? Tell me." The human emperor didn't get angry and asked instead, curious.

The demon sneered, "You wish."

Right then, all of them imperceptibly shuddered, feeling a bad feeling. It was so fleeting that if not for their senses, they would have thought it was nothing but a figment of their imagination.

Noticing they all seemed to have had this premonition, they exchanged a glance.

"It seems we have offended someone we shouldn't have." The human emperor smiled wryly before laughing, "Fortunately, none of my attacks landed on the snake; otherwise... hahaha!"

Save for a few of them, everyone else's expressions, especially two demons, including the scholarly purple-horned demon, and three humans' expressions, turned ugly at his words.

"Haha, don't worry too much, guys. It didn't die so that senior most likely wouldn't kill you and would just punish you lightly." The human emperor said before disappearing.

Boom! Boom!

Right then, the space where he stood exploded.

"Haha, why be angry? I was just trying to put your minds at ease." A taunting laugh echoed in the sky.

...

A few moments later, Kriss walked out of the rubble, carrying Pauline, who seemed to have gained additional injuries to her forehead and shoulder, in his arms.

The moment he came out, he saw Max carrying the huge Golden Snake on his back and was surprised. But before he could ask anything, Max rushed out of the valley and headed deeper into the mountain range.

"Follow me."

He couldn't leave the mountain range because he would be too noticeable carrying a large beast. Even if he could deceive the demons by using his disguise technique, those who would come looking for the Golden Python would be easily able to find him.

While remaining in the mountain range would be dangerous too, he didn't plan to stay for long. The moment the Golden Python and Pauline were healed, he would leave the place.

Since the spatial rift the Python used was unstable, it should be difficult for those who attacked it to track it down easily and should take quite some time.

'Let's just hope it is enough for them to heal and for us to leave.' He thought before his mind shifted to another thing.

'That premonition...'

'That premonition? Why did I have that?'

His brows furrowed tightly; he couldn't help but become anxious.

After seeing the golden python, he had thought it was related to it, but after a short while, he realized that wasn't the case.

'Don't tell me someone close to me is in danger?' The thought came to his mind. He very much wanted it to be false but knew that other than this, almost nothing should be able to give him this kind of premonition.

'Claire is in danger?'

Lily, Sera, and Emily couldn't be in any danger since they were under Wyomin and Lily's master—Rose's—protection in the safe War Temple.

As for his family, they should be safe in the Ninam city too because Elven reinforcements from the central plains, which had come with human reinforcements, had already gone to Elven cities and also because the demons, for some reason, weren't focused too much on conquering the Elven cities.

This only left Claire... and maybe little Ruo. Although he didn't feel he was too close to them yet, if they were in danger, the chances were high he would have a premonition.

But...

'Why do I feel it's not for them?'

No matter how much and how hard he thought about it, he couldn't figure out a logical reason behind the premonition, and this made him more anxious.

A short while later, he reached the depths of the mountain range and found a secluded area.

'No use in thinking about it too much.'

He took a deep breath, suppressing his anxiousness. When he had exchanged his war merits in the War Temple before entering the training room, he had already decided to leave the battlefield for the time being and return. Now that he had this premonition, he would have to just hurry back and ensure everything was alright.

Swoosh!

A moment later, Kriss arrived.

Max put the Python down and took out a bed.

"Lay her down. I'll try to help her."

Kriss's eyes lit up when he heard this. Though he wanted to ask if he had any confidence in helping her, seeing his expression, he swallowed his query, and after putting Pauline on the bed, he started putting down some formations.

...

A few minutes ago...

The Desert on the southwestern border of the Green Leaf Kingdom—the Desert of Oblivion—was almost a forbidden area and rarely had any people going near it.

Only when the kingdom's sects gave missions to hunt the native monsters found on the desert's periphery would disciples go near it.

Now that the demon invasion was ongoing and with the demons ignoring the area, no one should be here, but over the past few days, several figures could be seen entering the desert.

At this moment, at the center of the desert was a mountain range, and in its depths, in front of the Ancient Temple, several people were gathered and were silently floating in the air. Though everyone looked calm, there was some tension in the air.

Sitting in front of the temple's door, the middle-aged man in khaki robes and with unkempt hair opened his eyes and swept his gaze across them.

Everyone, feeling his gaze, instantly opened their eyes and respectfully waited for him to speak.

When the old, white-haired witch saw their respectful expressions, her mood soured, and she clicked her tongue in dissatisfaction, causing everyone to stiffen, fear flashing in their eyes.

"Haha, no need to be so tense, everyone." The middle-aged man's gentle voice helped them relax: "Even if everyone competent in this land comes at us together, with the senior here, no harm shall come to us. So, relax."

"Hmph! Do you mean they can harm us if the senior doesn't intervene?" The old witch harrumphed. Then her murky eyes shone with a chilling light: "Let them come. I shall show them that no matter how strong they think themselves to be, in front of me, they are nothing but ants."

"Is that so...?"

Right then, a voice rumbled in the sky above them before several figures appeared, radiating very strong auras.

"Then shall we see if we are really ants?" Two figures descended, looking calm and entirely unbothered by the fact that they were being surrounded by numerous enemies.

One of them was a human, a scholarly-looking, golden-haired man who seemed to be in his late twenties, while the other one was a demon. Other than his blood-red, demonic eyes, he looked entirely human.

The old witch narrowed her eyes when she saw them, a look of disgust appearing on her wrinkled face, while the khaki-robed man just sighed, appearing disappointed.

"You have really colluded with these abominations, child?" He asked the golden-haired man.

Rumble!

Right as his words fell, the red-eyed demon released his aura, causing the earth and sky to tremble.

"I would advise you to speak respectfully." The demon said, his voice biting cold. Then his gaze flicked to the temple. "Otherwise, even the senior inside might not have a chance to save you."

"Oh?! Why don't we put it to the test then?" The khaki-robed man said, slowly standing up.

The demon and human duo's pupils constricted as he rose to his feet, his aura, seemingly gentle, pressing down upon them with great force, giving them a suffocating feeling.

'So this is the difference?' The golden-haired man thought, his expression turning cold.

Both he and the blood demon beside him were peak Monarch realm experts, just like the khaki-robed man.

Not only that, he, being the leader of the strongest family behind the human alliance, was among the top three strongest human Monarch realm experts, ranked number two.

As for the blood demon, he was easily as strong and maybe slightly stronger than himself, but both of their auras combined weren't a match for this khaki-robed man's aura. This clearly showed the difference between them.

While it was possible for someone to possess a stronger aura while being weaker overall in comparison to their opponent—usually those who cultivated their auras but were not too accomplished were great examples of this—they wouldn't give much of a sense of threat.

As for this khaki-robed man, the sense of threat they were feeling from him was almost palpable, meaning he was really stronger than them and not by a small margin.

Ignoring him, the blood demon glanced at the golden-haired man, his lips curving up in a grin. "Now you know you're not wrong in allying with us to try to break out of this cage, don't you?"

The golden-haired man nodded, his expression turning more calm, cold, and determined as he spoke to the khaki-robed man, "If you agree to give us, the people of

this so-called forsaken land, a way out of here to the wider world, this can be settled peacefully; otherwise..."

He swept a glance at people surrounding them, "...There will be carnage."

"Tsk! You still think they would simply give us a way out? How foolish!" The blood demon sneered.

Boom!

The instant his words fell, there was a fluctuation in his aura, and it became several times stronger in an instant.

While it happened, he appeared in front of the khaki-robed man even though it didn't seem he had moved at all. His hand, which had already turned into a claw with his red nails growing out over two inches, swept toward his neck, aiming to decapitate him.

For a moment, it seemed the khaki-robed man was done for, but then...

Sigh!

A sigh rang out, and the blood demon was blasted back.

BOOM!!

When the Domain Emperor was alive, no power in the Terron—the strongest continent of the entire world—dared to offend the Imperial Domain Family, or now more commonly called the Domain Emperor family, casually.

In fact, even several thousand years after his death, the family held strong and ruled over a large part of the continent.

During this period, the family slowly became arrogant and started looking down on everyone, which offended many powers, which then became their enemies.

Unfortunately for them, the Domain Emperor family was too powerful for them to deal with. Knowing they could do them no harm, they had no choice but to suppress their rage and indignation and wait for the opportunity.

This opportunity took several thousand years, but it arrived when the family gradually stopped producing extraordinary talents and fell into a decline.

At this time, they acted with impunity and launched an all-out war, determined to annihilate the family.

Unfortunately for them, they underestimated the measures left behind by the Domain Emperor, who had already expected something like this when he established the family, and were unable to accomplish what they set out to do.

Still, the war hastened the decline of the family, and the suppression they faced afterwards ensured they wouldn't be able to recover.

Now, after thousands of years of suppression, the family went from standing at the peak of the world and ruling over a large part of the Terron to barely being able to keep a few cities and ensure they weren't completely annihilated.

The enemies they once saw as ants didn't even deign to personally do anything to suppress them and instead allowed their vessels to keep them in check.

One of these vessels was the Xavier family.

It ruled the territory that neighbored the Domain Emperor family's territory and had been keeping watch over the family for more than a thousand years now.

Whenever any young member showed potential, they would have them assassinated and had been suppressing the family in the economic area.

When the Domain Emperor family showed unusual movement over a month ago, even though the family tried to keep the news confidential, they quickly found out that someone had awakened the Imperial bloodline.

Immediately, they went on an alert because it was very bad news. They knew if someone with the Imperial bloodline was allowed to mature, they might not be able to suppress the family any longer. This was something neither they nor their lords were going to like.

After putting in quite a bit of effort, thanks to the Domain Family trying to hide it from their spies, they found out that, ironically, the family didn't know who this person, who had awakened the bloodline, was and were desperately trying to find him or her.

This news was both good and bad for the Xavier family. Good, because this person might not know he was related to the Domain Emperor family and therefore wouldn't have any familiar feelings. In this case, although the chances were low, he wouldn't return to the family, which means the family wouldn't be able to protect him.

It was bad because they most likely wouldn't be able to find him before it was too late. And if at that time, he returned to the Domain Emperor family, they wouldn't be able to do anything without causing another war.

Just when they were thinking what they should do, they got the news that the family had found out the whereabouts of the person in question.

They were ecstatic.

However, when they came to know where this person was—the Forsaken Land—there was absolute silence in the Xavier family.

Although the forsaken land wasn't a taboo topic, it wasn't well talked about. In fact, over the thousands of years, most people avoided mentioning it.

Because of this, currently, most people didn't even know what the forsaken land was. But the Xaviers, being a Bronze rank family, were privy to quite a bit of information about it, including the fact that no one was allowed to go there, not Bronze families like themselves or even Silver families like their lord family—the Silverthorn Family.

Since they couldn't do anything about it now, they had no choice but to relay the information to the Silverthorn Family.

They knew the Silverthorns wouldn't be happy with the situation, but they had no choice but to relay to them the information as it was and hope the Silverthorns wouldn't be too unhappy to punish them.

Days passed, and they didn't get any reply, which made them feel uneasy. But then they suddenly got the news that the Silverthorn family had issued a bounty on the head of the newly awakened Domain Family member.

Surprise and mostly confusion!

This was what the Xavier family's higher-ups felt when they heard the news because logically, the Silverthorn family, after realizing the person in question was out of reach and, being in the forsaken land, wasn't a threat, should drop all thoughts about him.

But they were issuing a bounty?

What was it if not strange?

Their confusion, however, didn't last long because the next day, a group of five from the Silverthorn family arrived.

...

Right when Max had the premonition, in the sacred grounds of the Xavier family, Patriarch Xavier and three ancestors of the Xavier family, who held the highest authority in the family, were looking at the large group standing at the center of an ancient-looking formation with expressionless looks on their faces.

"Activate it!" One of the five clocked figures, standing in front of the group, looked at Patriarch Xavier and ordered.

People standing at their back were surprised when they heard this.

Did this person just order Patriarch Xavier?

The next instant, they became shocked when, instead of seeing Patriarch Xavier get angry, they saw him nod his head and proceed to do what he was told.

Then their gazes, filled with shock, confusion, and wariness, shifted to the five cloaked figures. Just who were these people for Patriarch Xavier, a high-stage Monarch, to obey them?

While they were trying to figure this mystery out, a guy standing at the very back of the group, with almost no presence, thought, his eyes flickering, 'As I thought, they are from the Silverthorn family, and most likely, they are Emperors or maybe even Monarchs?'

Then he frowned and got lost in his thoughts.

...

Patriarch Xavier took out five finger-sized crystals that had milky white energy swirling inside them.

He stared at them for a few seconds, his eyes flashing with various thoughts, before he took a deep breath and threw them into the five nodes of the formation.

Rumble!

Immediately, the formation thrummed to life, and the space around the group rumbled and started twisting as if it was going to crack.

Everyone held their breaths and stood unmoving.

Then...

"No—"

"Ahh—"

"Sto—"

Several cries rang out, but they were cut short because the space had shredded them into pieces.

Whoosh!

Before anyone could react or feel anything about their sudden deaths, the group vanished.

The next instant, the formation fell silent, the energy of five crystals having been completely exhausted, and the space slowly stabilized.

Patriarch Xavier and the ancestors were silent for a while before all of their expressions turned ugly and their enraged roars rumbled through their sacred grounds.

"Damn you, Silverthorns!!!"

Patriarch Xavier was the first to regain control of his emotions.

His eyes flashing with a ruthless glint, he took out a small communication device.

The ancestors narrowed their eyes when they saw this, and one of them asked, "What are you doing?"

"I won't feel at ease if I don't do anything about it." Patriarch Xavier uttered coldly.

No power below the Gold rank was allowed to set foot on the forsaken land, and even the Gold powers had to have permission before they could go there. If not, they would be targeted by all the powers.

Silverthorns were just a silver-rank power and therefore couldn't go there. But they had used the Xavier family, a mere Bronze rank power, as the gateway to enter the forsaken land. This meant if those super powers found out about it, which they most likely would, their Xavier family would be annihilated.

"What do you want to do?" The ancestors asked,

"Although I can't take revenge on the Silverthorns, I can make things difficult for them." Patriarch Xavier's lips curled up into a cold grin. "I'm going to inform the Domain Emperor family that the Silverthorns had gone to the forsaken land."

The expression of three ancestors changed.

"No! You must not do that!" They unanimously shouted.

If the Domain Emperor family found out about it, they could use it as an excuse and enter the forsaken land without worrying about any consequences. While that would certainly make things difficult for the Silverthorn family, their own situation would become worse.

Sure, the act of sending people to the forsaken land had already placed them in hot water, but there was still a chance, however slim, that they would somehow survive it.

But if they inform the Domain Emperor family, the Silverthorn family would kill them to their last man for the 'betrayal.'

Patriarch Xavier gritted his teeth in frustration. He was angry, very angry, but he didn't want to stake his family just to take some petty revenge.

In the end, he chose to restrain his rage and put away the communication device.

"Good. Let's think with a cool head: what are we going to do going forward?" The ancestors said, and a lengthy discussion began.

...

"Heh, they really couldn't suppress themselves." A sneering voice echoed in the ancestor hall of the Domain Emperor family.

While Patriarch Xavier didn't inform them, the moment the teleportation formation sent the group to the forsaken land, the ancestors of the Domain Emperor family immediately found out. This showed despite having weakened greatly, it was not to be underestimated.

"You lot only have one objective, and that's to bring our estranged family member back, safe and sound. If you have to compromise somewhat to achieve this, do that; don't hesitate, but if you come across those Silverthorn bastards, don't show any mercy." A loud voice rumbled in the ancestral hall.

Immediately after, a gentler voice sounded, "Be careful out there. And if you run into some problem, seek out the head Watcher. He is a friend and will help you as much as he can. Good luck, children."

A group of ten people, all seemingly in their early to late twenties, stood at the center of a similar teleportation formation to the one the Xavier family used. The moment the ancestors' voice sounded, an old man standing outside the formation activated it.

"Yes, ancestors!" The group bowed in the direction of the ancestral hall.

Whoosh!

Unlike the Xavier family's teleportation formation, this formation didn't malfunction, and the group was safely sent away.

...

After the group vanished, the ancestral hall fell silent for a while before the gentle voice from before sighed.

"We should have tried to find out the current situation of the forsaken land before sending them."

There was no response for a while. Then,

"You are right, but how would it have been easy with our current strength? No one fears us, and the respect they once held for us is now completely gone." This voice was calm, but one could feel the hidden rage and helplessness in it.

"Sigh! Let's just hope everything goes well."

...

In front of the ancient temple...

BOOM!!

The blood demon was blasted back, blood spraying out of his mouth. He had a look of disbelief on his face as he looked at the khaki-robed man.

He knew this person was strong, but he had felt he could handle him after revealing his true strength. However, who knew this guy was also just like him, hiding his true strength all along?

Suddenly, his pupils constricted, and he spat out some more blood, which instantly turned into a blood arrow.

The khaki-robed man appeared in front of him, ready to punch him in the head, but had to change the target when he felt the threat from the blood arrow.

Bang!

Unclenching his fist, he slapped the arrow out of existence and was about to move toward the blood demon when he frowned and looked at his palm, where a small cut was.

Xyrus Bloodborn, the blood demon, grinned. "Old man, don't you know you should never let a blood demon injure—"

Swish!

The khaki-robed man casually clenched his palm. When he unclenched it, the injury had vanished. He then grinned at Xyrus, whose eyes were narrowed.

"Why did you stop? Tell me what I shouldn't let a blood demon do."

Intense rage and killing intent flickered in Xyrus' blood-red eyes when he heard his mocking words, but he didn't do anything rash; instead, he retreated more.

"Tch! You are no fun, little abomination." The khaki-robed man clicked his tongue in disappointment. His voice had just fallen when he appeared in front of Xyrus, his hand already grabbing his neck.

Xyrus was stunned. He had been able to react last time, but now...

The khaki-robed man lifted him in the air and calmly asked, "Tell me, do you really think that the senior would need to intervene and save my life from you?"

Xyrus looked at him silently before his lips curved up.

Boom!

The khaki-robed man's expression changed drastically as his intuition gave him blaring warnings.

He knew he wouldn't be able to avoid whatever was coming, so instead of trying to retreat, he gathered his strength and squeezed his hand, aiming to break his neck and destroy his demon core.

However...

Xyrus' sneer only deepened, "Yes, I think so."

BANG!!

BANG!!

An explosion went off between them, which sent powerful shockwaves rippling outwards that caused everyone at and below the Monarch realm, excluding the Old Witch, whose eyes narrowed into slits, to close their eyes and defend themselves.

When the shockwaves ebbed and they were finally able to see, their eyes also narrowed because one of their strongest Monarchs—the khaki-robed man—had lost his right hand, with which he had picked Xyrus up.

Not only that, from his neck to all the way down to his lower abdomen, his flesh and muscles had corroded, revealing his bones and inner organs that also seemed to have been injured.

His face was pale, and blood was flowing out of his mouth, but despite his badly mangled state, the glow in his eyes didn't lessen; in fact, they only seemed to glow brighter now, but unlike before, they were decidedly chilly.

As for Xyrus, he had gone completely pale as if he had no blood in his body. Also, his breathing was very strained. Clearly, whatever ability or technique he used had completely drained him, or it seemed so at least.

He, however, didn't care about it at all and was staring at the khaki-robed man with disbelief clear in his widened eyes.

Not only did he manage to avoid being killed by his strongest ability, but he also...

He looked down at his chest and saw a large, gaping hole dripping with a minor amount of blood and pieces of his heart.

He looked at the khaki-robed man and asked, his voice unlike someone who was on the verge of death. "What's your name?"

The khaki-robed man contemplated for a moment, clearly not wanting to tell him, but then he looked at his missing hand and said, "People call me Monarch Robert."

Xyrus nodded. "You are very strong, Robert."

Robert didn't respond, and Xyrus turned his head toward the golden-haired man standing in some distance, his lips curling up in a miserable and hateful smile. "You are seeing this, Rivervale?"

He said while pointing at his heart, "I was defeated in just one exchange after he got serious. My strength, which is one of the strongest among Monarch realm experts of this caged land, doesn't amount to much in front of them. Cough!"

Suddenly he coughed, his eyes becoming hazy and his body swaying, "...You should stop hesitating now, shouldn't you? We have to... break out of this..."

Thud!

Mid-sentence, he fell down on his back, his lifeless eyes staring at the sky with a longing look as he raised his hand toward it. But then he seemed to have lost the last bit of his strength, and his hand fell down as the last word he would ever say echoed like a whisper.

"...Cage."

Banner Rivervale stared at Xyrus' dead body in a daze. He didn't even react when the old witch and Monarch Robert appeared on his either side, grabbing toward him to incapacitate him.

From their conversation, they understood Banner was still undecided, and that was why there weren't many monarch realm experts in their coalition.

Old Witch's palm was glowing with an ominous energy within which several illusory, screaming faces could faintly be seen. As for Robert, his hand had turned into a stone, radiating a heavy pressure.

Given how strong Robert was, the old witch couldn't be too much weaker than him. So, they thought it was a foregone conclusion that Banner would be incapacitated.

The reason they thought like this even after seeing Xyrus suddenly become stronger was because he was a blood demon, a race known for their mysterious and unorthodox ways. And while he managed to harm Robert quite a bit, it was mostly because Robert had underestimated him because everyone in this forsaken land was, honestly, quite weak by their standards, and thus he was taken off guard.

But Banner, he was a human. Even if he was hiding his strength, without good enough techniques and limited resources of the forsaken land, he would still be weaker than Xyrus.

Even if that was not the case and he turned out to be stronger than Xyrus, with both of them acting simultaneously, even that wouldn't be much of a problem. At most, they would have to reveal their real strength.

However, what happened next was completely out of their expectations.

Zoop~

Their hands landed on his shoulders, or they should have landed, but instead, they went through him as though he wasn't there.

Their pupils constricted and their divine senses flared. Immediately, they looked up and saw him standing in the sky among his group, looking down at Xyrus' corpse.

Robert took a deep breath, his expression turning solemn: "A spatial mage, how rare!"

Old Witch's expression also changed, but she was clearly thinking something different than Robert because there was a greedy glint in her murky eyes.

Finally, Banner Rivervale turned his gaze away from Xyrus' corpse and looked at them before looking at the temple.

"Senior, do you really want us to cause a massacre?"

...

Sigh!

Inside the temple, when the Old Witch and Robert moved to attack Banner, the middle-aged man in pristine white robes sitting cross-legged beside the ten-foot-tall golden stele sighed.

Then a few moments later, he heard Banner's question and sighed again, this time with a hint of pity.

He didn't blame him and others for trying to break out of the forsaken land. If he were in his shoes, he would have tried to do the same. After all, there weren't many resources to cultivate properly and pursue the peak. Not only that, they were sealed with a dormant calamity that—when it erupted—would annihilate them all.

Unfortunately, apart from feeling pity, he couldn't do anything. He was just a Watcher, a guard, after all.

Just as he was about to respond and tell him that their efforts were futile, his gaze flicked to the formation in front of him.

'Hm?' When he felt the Golden Stele vibrate and activate the formation, he frowned.

'An unauthorized access?'

His expression darkened. This was bad.

...

Outside the temple, Banner's patience was about to run out when he felt an extremely faint fluctuation in the space and his eyes flashed.

Reacting almost instantly, he took out an ancient-looking golden, round ball and grabbed it with both his hands before closing his eyes, his mana and aura suddenly surging without stopping.

Everyone looked at him in surprise while Robert and the Old Witch looked at him in confusion. 'Is he... trying to find the spatial tunnel?'

'Naive!'

This thought had just appeared in their minds when they saw an unassuming middle-aged man in white robes suddenly appear in front of Banner.

He felt somewhat familiar to them for a moment before they realized who he was and their expressions changed drastically.

He was their sole superior in this forsaken land, the head Watcher and a Quasi-Supreme mage. If he felt the need to take action himself, this meant Barren was... But that shouldn't be possible even if he was talented in spatial magic.

Unless...

Both their expressions changed drastically as they realized what had happened.

'Fortunately, Senior has acted otherwise—'

They had just sighed in relief seeing the head Watcher about to capture Barren when the situation changed once again.

Fwsh!

"Leave the kid alone, friend."

"Fuck off!"

Two voices, one calm and could be considered polite and the other one rude, sounded out as two figures slowly materialized in front of Barren, holding onto the Head Watcher's hand.

Both were old men.

The first one, dressed in simple-looking golden-white robes, had a head full of white hair and a white mustache and a well-kept beard. His facial features were similar to Barren's, indicating he was an ancestor of the Rivervale family.

The second man was dressed in black robes with blood-red strips, and he had waist-length blood-red hair. Unlike the Rivervale ancestor, who had a smiling expression on his wrinkled face, his expression was grim and full of murderous intent.

The head Watcher looked at them and seemed to sigh. He then looked at Ancestor Rivervale and asked, "You sure you want to take this path?"

Ancestor Rivervale didn't hesitate and nodded, "Yes. It's been a long enough time."

The head Watcher stared into the distance, his eyes glazing over as he said, "You are not wrong, but what you are going to do—"

He stopped mid-sentence before shaking his head. "I'm no one to judge you. Alright, I wish you luck."

Everyone was shocked and flabbergasted when they heard him.

What was going on? Wasn't he supposed to fight a bloody battle with them and stop them like it happened several times before?

Why was he wishing them good luck now?

Robert and the Old Witch exchanged a glance, their expressions turning solemn. They then flew up.

"What do you think you are doing, Senior?" The Old Witch asked coldly.

Before the head Watcher could respond, though it seemed like he wasn't going to, another voice sounded.

"Yeah, why don't you tell us, head Watcher? Just what do you think you are trying to do by allowing these ants to do as they please?"

Bang!

As everyone, except the head Watcher, turned to look at the temple, the doors slammed open from inside, and five cloaked figures flew up, immediately circling Barren, Ancestor Rivervale, the Blood Demon ancestor, and... the head Watcher.

Ancestor Rivervale and the Blood Demon ancestor frowned when they saw the five figures. They didn't fear them because the strongest of them was just a high-stage Monarch but because there should be five monarch realm watchers in total. They were pretty sure of it because their old records told them that ever since the land was caged, there always had been just one Quasi-Supreme and five Monarch rank watchers.

Robert and the Old Witch were in front of them while the other three hadn't acted and were only watching from the beginning while staying hidden near the temple, and even now they were still there.

This meant these five were new arrivals, and this was bad news for them.

'Do those people already know about what's going on here? Is this why the head Watcher isn't bothered to act against us and instead wished us good luck?'

Ancestor Rivervale and the Blood Demon ancestor frowned, immediately dismissing the thought. From what they could see, this was clearly not the case.

Right then, their eyes flashed, and they placed their hands on Banner's shoulders.

The head Watcher watched on calmly, but the five cloaked figures frowned before immediately rushing toward them.

Unfortunately for them... Banner and two ancestors abruptly disappeared from the place.

"A spatial mage?" Their well-concealed silver eyes flashed. Then one of them suddenly trembled and pointed toward the head Watcher, "Y- You allowed him to find the spatial tunnel's coordinates?"

The head Watcher swept an expressionless gaze across them before saying, "Be prepared."

As soon as his voice rang out, he disappeared, leaving the five to stand there in a daze. After a moment, when they realized what he meant, their pupils constricted.

They understood what he meant by those words.

It was they who broke the rules by coming here without permission and coincidentally allowed a genius spatial mage, who just happened to be here, to sense the spatial tunnel leading outside the forsaken land's sealing array.

While they could say the responsibility lay with the head Watcher because he allowed them to escape, they would be accepting it was their family—the Silverthorn—that broke the rule, which would result in their annihilation.

They looked at one another, secretly letting out a sigh of relief before their lips curled up.

Be prepared? They were already prepared.

Their cloaks weren't just ordinary cloth but higher-grade magic artifacts that perfectly concealed the wearer's identity from everyone below the Supreme Realm experts.

Of course, there were some exceptions, but from what they know about the head Watcher from their investigation, he wasn't one among these exceptions, which meant he didn't know who they were.

As for when other powers investigated them, well, they could investigate and annihilate the party that broke the rule—the Xavier family—for all they cared.

Right then, the group that arrived with them walked out of the temple.

"So how are we going to find our target?" One of the five asked the high-stage Monarch, ignoring the gazes lingering on them.

The high-stage Monarch glanced at the group before sweeping his gaze across the emperor mages and demons that came with Barren and Xyrus and were now trying to leave the place inconspicuously.

When they felt his gaze, their expressions hardened. Without their Monarchs, they would be helpless if these people wanted to kill them.

"Let's see if we can get a clue about his approximate location from them. After that we can use the bloodline detector to find him."

Since they didn't have a Domain Emperor family member for them to perform [Bloodline Resonance Detection Method], even with the blood essence of the Domain Emperor family members they had in their possession, they couldn't pinpoint their target's location, especially when they didn't know how far they were from him.

If they were too far, the blood essence they had would burn out before finding him, a risk they couldn't afford to take.

So, they had no choice but to try to find some clues about his whereabouts first...

Buzz!

Right then, however, they heard a familiar buzzing sound and spread their divine senses inside the temple. Normally no one, not even the Quasi-Supremes like Ancestor Rivervale, Blood Demon Ancestor, or even the head Watcher, could penetrate the ancient temples with their divine senses to see the situation inside, but because the door was now open, they faced no difficulty.

The moment their divine senses swept inside the temple, their expressions darkened and they exuded a murderous aura.

"The Xaviers dare betray us? They must be seeking death!" One of them said, his voice cold.

...

Inside the temple, the group of ten from the Domain Emperor family appeared in the formation.

The head Watcher narrowed his eyes and questioned, finding them somewhat familiar, "The Imperial Domain family?"

The temporary leader of the group, Luman Arcadius, a handsome man with an extraordinary disposition and shoulder-length jet black hair, bowed slightly toward him, followed by others: "Greetings, Senior! We are indeed the descendants of the Imperial Domain Family."

"Mhm." The head Watcher nodded before asking in an emotionless voice while his eyes flickered, "Why are you here, and that too without permission?"

"Senior, we are here to find one of our family members..."

Luman didn't try to hide anything from him and explained everything because his ancestor had told them the head Watcher was her friend, meaning he could be trusted.

Moreover, it wouldn't be difficult for him to find out if he tried a little. After all, seeing how Silverthorns had found out, it was no longer a secret.

"I see..." The head Watcher nodded in understanding. He then asked, "So, those who came before you were your enemies, right?"

"Yes, you are right." Luman nodded, his eyes flickering as he spread his divine sense out of the temple.

"Don't bother. They have already left." The head Watcher said,

Luman's gaze flashed. "Senior, if you don't mind, can you tell us how many Monarchs there were in their group?"

"Five, one in the high stage, three in the mid-stage, and the last one was in the low stage." The head Watcher told him.

The people behind Luman seemed to relax when they heard this, and while Luman was still cautious, the Head Watcher could see he had become a bit more confident.

Hesitation flickered in his eyes for a moment before he sighed, "Though I don't want to interfere in your matters, you are her descendants, and I'm sure despite our strained relationship, she must have told you to rely on me when in need."

Numerous mixed emotions flashed across his face when he mentioned her, but almost no one was about to notice them.

He then continued, looking deep into Luman's eyes, "They didn't leave because they felt your group is stronger."

...

A while later, except for Robert, Old Witch, and their subordinate emperors, no one could be seen in the ancient temple's vicinity.

Right at the edge of the desert, a few people who were originally part of the group of fifty that came with the Silverthorn Monarchs were escaping with all their might, panic-stricken.

"Fuck! Why are these fuckers hunting us down instead of going after those five bastards?" A muscular woman wrapped in rags roared in rage.

BANG!

Suddenly, a light flashed, and her head exploded.

Others' expressions turned ugly, but they continued fleeing without turning to look back. They couldn't afford to.

The people—no demons—chasing after them were emperors. The only reason they were still alive was because they were having fun hunting them.

If they showed any tardiness, slowed down, or even showed less desperation, these demons wouldn't have as much fun, which would result in their death.

The situation was almost hopeless, and everyone had grim expressions on their faces. But if someone were to observe them carefully, they would realize that unlike the rest of the people in the group, a youth with an ordinary appearance seemed different.

While he also wore a grim expression, the calm look in his eyes betrayed his real state of mind.

This youth was none other than Alex. After parting ways with the blind old man, he was investigating around, trying to find a way to enter the forsaken land, when he heard that the Xavier family was hiring a group of independent mages for an undisclosed task and were offering tempting rewards.

He was about to ignore it and move on when he suddenly thought of something.

Just when the Silverthorn family released a secret mission to kill the Domain Emperor family member who had just awakened his bloodline, the Xaviers—a vassal power of the Silverthorn family, the Domain Emperor family's enemy, that had been covertly and overtly suppressing the Domain Emperor family—were suddenly gathering people for a secret task.

This could be a coincidence, but his intuition told him otherwise.

That was why he immediately headed to the Xavier family and participated in the selection for the secret mission.

'How long are they going to take?' Alex mused. He had been lingering at the back of the group, right outside the temple's opened gate, when the five cloaked figures were encircling the head Watcher and the two native powerhouses.

That was when he had noticed the golden steel hum, powering up the teleportation formation.

Although he was not able to see who arrived because the group had moved away from the temple's gate by then, seeing how the five cloaked figures—who he was sure were from the Silverthorn family—looked at the temple when this unknown party arrived, how their body language shifted, and how they left without taking them along, he deduced the Domain Emperor family had come.

Again, this party could be from some other family or organization, but his intuition told him they were from the Domain Emperor family.

Now, even though he could escape the demon emperors, he wasn't doing that because he wanted to remain in the temple's vicinity until the Domain Emperor Family's group left for their target.

The thought of escaping the demons and still lingering around the area didn't even cross his mind because he was more than sure he would be detected. He didn't have the means to keep his existence hidden from a Monarch's, let alone a Quasi-Supreme's, senses.

When that happened, whichever party—be it the watchers, the new arrivals, or the natives—found him, the result would most likely be his death or capture, and neither was acceptable to him.

Just when he was getting a little frustrated, he sensed several powerful presences with the aura of Terron fly... in the direction opposite to the one he and the group of morons with him were running in.

'Just great!' He let out a frustrated sigh before a faint white glow covered his figure.

"Hmm?" The three demon emperors with black cicada-like wings on their backs chasing after the group suddenly frowned. They felt some faint fluctuations but couldn't find the source until...

"One outer rat is missing." One of them noticed Alex missing, his expression twisting in rage.

A mere Five Star mage managed to escape them... It was an utter humiliation.

The other two's expressions became the same. Their divine senses flaring, they scanned several thousand meters of area around them but found nothing. They even checked the ground, thinking he might be hiding under the sand, but the result was the same.

"Raaaaagh!!"

They were silent for a few seconds before they screamed in rage, the sound alone causing everyone in the group fleeing in front of them to explode in a gory rain of flesh and blood.

...

A mile away, Alex turned back when he heard the cry.

Seeing what had just happened, a hint of guilt flashed in his eyes as he lamented.

"Sigh! I'm sorry, you all. But you shouldn't blame me because you were too weak and weren't able to escape them in time. Anyways, may you all rest in peace. As for them..."

His eyes narrowed as he stared at the demon trio.

"...If they aren't dead by the time I become an Emperor... or maybe a Monarch, I'll avenge you by killing them..."

"...or maybe not."

If they weren't already dead, they would have spat out blood in anger after hearing him.

Swoosh!

The moment he stopped muttering, he turned around and rushed in the direction Luman's group had just vanished.

The strange thing was, he was just a mile away, a very short distance for emperor-rank experts. He spoke, or rather muttered, out loud and didn't even care that rushing away so fast was producing noise, but the demon trio... didn't seem to sense anything.

Ha!

Pulling his hands back from the golden python's body, Max heaved a deep breath, his forehead covered with sweat.

He had done nothing but help Pauline recover her exhausted blood essence via his bloodline energy, which, although exhausting, wasn't too difficult to do.

However, when he attempted to heal the golden python, he hit a roadblock—his bloodline energy wasn't potent enough.

Still, he tried to use quantity to overcome the quality, and in doing so, he almost exhausted his bloodline energy reserves but still failed to make any significant difference to the python's injuries.

Kriss was sitting beside the bed Pauline was lying on. After Max had helped her and told him she was going to be alright, he wasn't as worried and regained his composure.

For a while now, he had been watching Max and the golden python with fascination. Even with his knowledge, he didn't know what magic beast it was, but what really fascinated him was the fact that the beast was only giving off the aura of a Grade Five beast, but it was still alive despite several tyrannical energies, stronger than a king mage's energy, rampaging in its wounds.

Seeing Max stop, he was about to speak up but before he could; Max once again put his hands on the python and closed his eyes.

Nascent Energy slowly seeped out of his palms and entered the python's body.

A few minutes later, Max felt the python's stiff body relax, which put a smile on his face. He then started moving the Nascent Energy toward a wound on its back, but...

Boom!

The violent energy in the wound reacted and rebuffed it, and their collision caused Python pain, which made it twitch.

This was the first time he was seeing his Nascent Energy fail at something. Although he was aware that no matter how magical it was, he couldn't expect it to work everywhere, and even if it could work in this case, his current realm—Four Star—was limiting its potential, his expression fell.

After staring at the unconscious python for a while, he sighed and continued injecting more Nascent Energy into its body, trying to relieve as much of its pain as he could.

Since neither his bloodline energy nor his Nascent Energy was useful in this case, the thought of using the Death Energy came to his mind, but he squashed it as soon as it came because if even the Nascent Energy—the gentlest energy he knew about—caused such a violent reaction, the reaction the Death Energy would cause would be several times worse.

"Is this your companion beast?" Kriss asked when Max finished. This question had been bothering him ever since he saw him carry the Python.

Max glanced at him before looking at the Python. "Yes."

"Then—"

"Enough with the questions." Max interrupted him, "Tell me, do you have a beast storage bag?"

"I don't," Kriss shook his head before looking at Pauline with a sympathetic gaze. "But Miss Pauline has one. Her companion beast died a few days ago. So, you can use it."

Max nodded and waited for him to take it from Pauline and give it to him, but Kriss didn't move, making him raise his brows.

"What are you doing?"

"Huh? Nothing." Kriss said, confused.

Max resisted a twitch of his lips and said, "Then get it for me."

"How? Only she can use her spatial—oh, she didn't put it in her spatial ring." Kriss said in realization.

Max almost rolled his eyes. Clearly, despite looking composed, Kriss still hasn't come to his senses properly; otherwise, he would already know it because a beast bag couldn't be stored in a spatial ring. So, everyone kept it on their person, and it gradually became a habit.

Kriss stood up, looked at her unconscious Pauline, and reached out with his hand toward her slender waist, nervously gulping.

Just then...

"What are you doing?"

He froze and stiffly tilted his head, looking at Pauline, who had just opened her eyes. Quickly calming himself, he pulled his hand back and stood straight. "I-I was taking your beast bag. Max needs it to store his beast."

"Max?" Pauline furrowed her brows.

A short while later, Kriss finished telling her how Max came to help them after finding that they were still alive and how he helped her heal.

Pauline looked at Max and bowed her head, "Thank you for coming to save us, Max. I'm grateful, truly."

Seeing this, Kriss followed her lead and thanked him.

"No need to thank me. I just did what I felt was right." Max casually said while inwardly sighing. 'Truly, people mature and change after experiencing adverse situations.'

Pauline didn't say anything in response but maintained her posture for a few seconds more. Seeing this, Kriss, who had raised his head after Max spoke, dipped his head again.

A while later, Max stored the Golden Python in the beast storage bag and glanced at Pauline. "Do you need to rest a bit more?"

Pauline shook her head. "No, I'm good to go."

"Good." Max nodded before taking out two black robes. He pulled on the devil blood in his heart and stained the robes with pure demonic energy.

"Here, wear these and follow closely after me."

...

Swoosh!

The group left the mountain range without facing any problem, which made Max frown.

'Shouldn't they have already found this place?' He thought.

While it had only been just over half an hour and the place from which Golden Python teleported over might be far away, he knew emperors, given their extraordinary means, should have already arrived, but there was no trace of them.

If he hadn't had that premonition, he would have just shrugged his shoulders and felt relieved, but now everything out of place was making him feel suspicious.

'I need to hurry back home.' He thought before taking out his communication crystal. He had tried sending a message to Anna, but apparently he was too far for the communication crystal to work.

'Do you have any teleportation formation that can send me to the southern part of the Green Leaf Kingdom?' He asked Ashroth.

Originally, he first planned to go to the Royal City. There he would free Flavia and take her, Little Ruo, her grandpa, Claire, and her son along as he returned to Ninam City. But now, he shelved, or rather delayed, his visit to the Royal City and was returning to Ninam City directly.

Right then...

Rumble!

The ground quaked, and the sky seemed to darken. At the same time, an extreme sense of danger arose from the depths of his heart.

And apparently, he wasn't the only one to feel this way because behind him, Kriss and Pauline had gone pale from the dread they were feeling and were uncontrollably shivering.

"W-What's happening?" Pauline asked, instinctively moving over to Kriss' side and grabbing his hand.

Kriss showed no previous nervousness and hesitation as he protectively wrapped his arm around her waist and looked up with a grave look in his eyes, "I don't know, but it feels as if someone... or something extremely dangerous has locked onto me."

"I feel the same." Pauline nodded.

Max's eyes flashed when he heard them because... he didn't feel the same. He then closed his eyes, activated his bloodline sense, and focused around him.

It was then he noticed...

'It's trying to lock onto me too, but...'

Weng~

Just then, an almost inaudible sound rang out, and the sense of danger they were feeling multiplied several times.

Max felt his heart shiver.

This was too overwhelming, but he knew he couldn't afford to be distracted because whatever it was, it was going to arrive in the next few seconds.

Immediately, he tapped on his Nascent Energy reserves and started pulling it out of himself without holding anything back. At the same time, he looked at Kriss and Pauline. Seeing they seemed to be in a daze and were unsteadily swaying on their feet, his expression fell.

"COME TO ME!"

He shouted at the top of his lungs while trying to inject some Nascent Energy into his voice to help them come to their senses quicker. Unfortunately, he wasn't a Sound Elemental mage, nor had he ever tried doing so before, so he failed.

His expression worsened.

He had already pulled out some Nascent Energy. If he were to move over to them, he would lose control over at least half of it.

However... seeing his shout wasn't effective, he had no choice unless he wanted to see them die.

Swoosh!

Right as he made up his mind to sacrifice the Nascent Energy, Kriss' eyes regained clarity. Activating his shadow movement spell, he rushed over while pulling Pauline along.

Since they weren't too far apart, it took them less than a second to arrive beside him.

Seeing this, Max focused on creating a spherical barrier around them. Because he had too little time, he managed to pull out Nascent Energy barely enough to create a thin barrier that any regular Four Star mage could destroy.

But if he wasn't wrong, just this would be enough to help them survive the incoming danger without any problem; otherwise, nothing—even a barrier strong enough to resist an emperor's attack—was going to be enough.

In the next moment, he heaved a sigh of relief because the overwhelming sense of danger was no longer there.

Standing beside him, the moment the barrier was completed, Kriss also felt the sense of danger disappear.

Sighing in relief, he looked at Max in amazement. Just like him, he also felt that nothing could stop whatever it was from reaping his life, but Max managed to surprise him yet again.

'This man... Just who is he?'

Pauline gradually came to her senses, and upon seeing they were within the barrier created by Max, she knew he had once again saved their lives.

She bit her lower lip, her expression unreadable. Then she said, "Thank you for saving us again."

Max didn't acknowledge her this time because he was busy thinking just what had happened. What was this calamity-level danger, and how come just a simple barrier of Nascent Energy managed to overcome it? Also, was it just directed at them or... everyone?

He shuddered when this thought crossed his mind.

Maybe those in the Emperor and maybe even those in the King realm could survive this enigmatic danger, but just how many were emperors and kings? And just how many were in the lower realms? What about the ordinary folks?

If it was really targeting everyone in a certain area, he feared there was barely anyone alive now. After all, not everyone had Nascent Energy or something similar that could save them.

But more than these countless unrelated people, he was more worried about those close to him. That was why he hurriedly took out his communication crystal and messaged Wyomin, but... the barrier blocked the message.

His worried mind told him to open the barrier and allow the message to be sent, but his logical mind told him to wait for a while in case the danger hadn't passed yet.

After hesitating for a while, he took a deep breath and closed his eyes, having decided to wait.

If they were safe now, they would be safe a while later too, and if...

'Nothing bad must have happened to them, otherwise I'll make every involved party in this mess regret ever being born.'

As he decided this, in his bloodline space, both the Lust Overlord Bloodline and the Imperial Bloodline thrummed, their glow intensifying ever so slightly while his aura underwent a subtle change.

Max, however, didn't notice any of this because he wasn't in the right state of mind to do so. Standing beside him, Kriss and Pauline, however, felt as though they were standing next to some supreme, sacred, and untouchable entity, which induced a reverential and dreadful feeling within them.

...

After the earth quaked, every living being in the kingdoms' and empires' territory, meaning all of the human continent save for the central plains, froze in place, feeling the overwhelming danger.

Throughout the region, be it human, demon, elven, dwarf, or any other race's emperor, everyone's expressions turned somber. They then released their auras, covering as many people as they could, wanting to save their lives.

Shua!

Outside the War Temple, King Azaroth appeared in the sky above the place where Princess Martha and others from the Green Leaf kingdom were and released his

domain, covering them. At the same time, he swept his gaze across the battlefield and saw just a few emperors—Lady Verana, Alton, Tristen, Wyomin, and two others of their group—were trying to save the masses, which caused his expression to darken.

Unlike most emperors, who had already received information beforehand, he didn't know anything and just instinctively felt that people, as long as they weren't an emperor or above or extraordinary king mages, were going to die.

That was why he rushed out and took his subjects in his domain, hoping it would save them.

It took exactly one minute for the sense of danger to vanish.

As soon as it did, his domain also vanished.

Normally he could keep his domain deployed for hours, but now, just after one minute, he was thoroughly spent.

Ha! Ha! Ha!

He heaved deep breaths, his face pale and his body covered with perspiration.

'Just what was that?'

He thought before turning his head around to look at Lady Verana and others. Just like him, they were also heaving deep breaths, appearing exhausted but not as much as him.

Then he looked down, and immediately his face fell.

More than half of the people who were inside his domain had died, their bodies shriveled up as if someone had sucked everything out of them, while many had fallen unconscious. He only sighed in relief upon seeing his sister was safe.

After that, he swept his gaze across the battlefield.

Just six emperors could cover everyone, especially when people were spread out and it drained quite a bit of their stamina and mental energy to keep the aura field and spheres activated.

So, he already expected many people to have died, but when he saw almost 90% of the people present on the battlefield were now nothing but dried-up corpses, his expression couldn't help but turn grimmer.

Swoosh!

He moved over to Lady Verana and coldly asked, "What just happened?"

Lady Verana looked up before sighing, "They were... sacrificed."

Azareth's pupils constricted, a vague piece of information he read several years ago surfacing in his mind.

"Don't tell me..."

...

BANG!

Max punched a large boulder into pieces, his aura fluctuating erratically.

BANG! BANG! BANG!

"Arrrggghhh!"

He smashed several more boulders before raising his head toward the sky and letting out an enraged roar.

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In disbelief, Kriss and Pauline watched him destroy the landscape in rage.

After seeing his extraordinary strength and having witnessed him doing several seemingly impossible things, all while appearing mostly calm and collected, they had come to view him as a dangerous but level-headed guy.

So, seeing him rage like this, they couldn't help but wonder just what he had heard in the message he received a while ago that made him go out of control like this.

They also felt a bad feeling well up in their hearts because they vaguely felt whatever had happened had affected them too. The only reason they were just watching him while suppressing the unsettling feeling in their hearts was because they didn't know what exactly had happened.

They, of course, tried connecting their family members in the battlefield, knowing they were too far for their communication crystal to send or receive messages to and from the Royal City, but they weren't able to contact them. However, they didn't find it abnormal because he had been unable to contact them ever since they entered the demon territory.

But this also made them curious.

'How was he able to receive a message when we couldn't?'

"Arrggghhh!"

After a while, Max finally stopped rampaging, but his enraged roar that made them shiver told them his anger hadn't calmed down even a bit. He was just trying to control it.

They exchanged a glance between them.

'Should we talk to him now?' Pauline seemed to ask with her eyes, concerned.

'Let's wait for a while.' Kriss shook his head.

After that roar, Max stood still for several minutes, but his aura was still fluctuating violently. It only started to calm down a quarter of an hour later.

Kriss and Pauline walked over when they saw this.

Kriss put his hand on his shoulder and asked, "You alright?"

Ha!

Max heaved a deep breath and exhaled it before nodding slowly, his voice uncharacteristically cold. "Yes,"

"What happened?" Kriss asked,

Max turned toward them, his expression cold and indifferent as he said, "A mass sacrifice."

Kriss and Pauline paled when they heard this. "Was our..."

Knowing what she was going to ask, Max interrupted Pauline, "Countless living beings throughout the kingdoms and empires outside the central plains were sacrificed to an ancient formation."

"This shouldn't be true, no, it can't be true..." Pauline trembled, shaking her head in a mixture of disbelief, denial, and despair, while Kriss stood there, motionless and emotionless, but a black haze covered his eyes, making him look demonic.

Max stayed silent for a few minutes, letting them come to their senses, but when they didn't, despite sympathizing with them, he said, "I'm going back home. Are you guys coming with me or..."

"I'll go to Royal City." Kriss and Pauline simultaneously said,. After thanking him once again in a daze, they turned and left in a hurry.

Despite knowing Max hadn't lied to them because they had felt this sacrificial formation lock on to them, they wanted to see for themselves if their families were alive or... they were also sacrificed.

Watching them leave, Max also rushed away, heading toward Ashroth's place. Since very few people should be alive now, he wasn't worried that they would run into some trouble. This mass sacrifice... it had practically ended the war, maybe for good... or maybe it was just the beginning.

...

A moment after Barren and two Quasi-Supremes vanished, they appeared in a secret location deep underground. There were already several people—Humans, Elves, and Demons—present there.

At a glance, one could see humans were the dominant faction here, while the number of elves was less than demons.

"So?" One of the demons and elves asked at the same time, their voices filled with anticipation.

Barren swept his gaze across them.

Save for a few from his faction who wore slightly conflicting expressions on their faces, everyone else was eager to go ahead with the plan. They did not, not even a bit, care about the countless lives that were going to be lost in the next short while to pave their paths to the outside world.

But he was sure if he mentioned this, they would wear pitiful and guilty expressions for a few moments, and then they would say that their sacrifice was necessary to break out of this cage and it would be remembered by every generation to come, which, in his opinion, was utter bullshit.

But...

'I'm a hypocrite.' He chuckled bitterly.

He wasn't much different than anyone else here. His desire to break out of this cage and be free was just as strong, though his reasons might be different from some of theirs...

And to be free of the constraints placed on him, even if it pained him or caused him to feel guilty for the rest of his life, he would go ahead with the plan.

When the demons saw his expression become cold and determined, their eyes flashed with a triumphant glint. As for the elves, they showed no changes in their expressions.

"We got lucky." Barren said, his words causing everyone to raise their brows in confusion. Barren had no desire to explain himself, so he continued, "Our chances to break out of the Three Grand Sealing Formation have increased by at least one-third. So, let's not delay this any longer and activate the sacrificial formation."

Saying this, he took out a piece of violet rock and placed it in the hole at the center of the hall they were in. After that, he sat down, placed both his hands on either side of the hole, and closed his eyes.

The demons and elves narrowed their eyes and looked at the blood demon and the Rivervale ancestor for explanation. They weren't going to complete the key without knowing everything, especially when Barren seemed to want to control the formation.

"Keke, no need to be so wary." The blood demon ancestor chuckled, "Through a stroke of luck, he managed to get the coordinates of the spatial tunnel of the sealing formation."

Everyone's eyes glinted upon hearing this.

"This means we don't need to waste energy while opening the passageway at a random point of the sealing formation..." A human expert, another Quasi-Supreme muttered in realization. "No wonder he said our chances increased."

After that, he stood up, took out a similar piece of rock, and placed it in the hole, followed by another human expert. After that, two demons stood up and did the same, leaving room in the hole just enough for another piece of rock.

Everyone looked at the beautiful, green-haired elven woman, who seemed to be lost in her thoughts.

Feeling their gazes, she stood up, walked over to the hole, and took out the piece of rock but didn't put it in right away. Instead, she looked down at Barren and asked in a soft voice, "Are we doing the right thing?"

Everyone frowned but didn't say anything. Barren opened his eyes and met her gaze.

After a moment, he shook his head. "I'm not sure, but I'm willing to proceed."

Saying this, he paused for a moment before adding, "However, if you don't want to do this, I'll make sure no harm comes to your people."

While his words caused some dissatisfaction among the humans and angered the demons, the elven woman smiled bitterly.

"Don't try to make me feel responsible."

Saying this, she put the rock in the hole, completing the activation key, which activated the sacrificial formation.

A minute later, a massive amount of energy was gathered beneath the hole, which Barren forced toward the spatial tunnel hidden in the massive sealing formation.

BANG!

Whirl!

"IT'S DONE!!" A demon shouted, ecstatic. However, in the next moment, his expression changed, becoming enraged.

His gaze flicked over to the exhausted Barren, who was staring at the spatial tunnel in front of him with narrowed eyes, and he shouted,

"HOW DARE YOU DECEIVE US!!!"