

## **Seller 701**

### Chapter 701: The Sect Head Trials (Part-7)

He understood immediately that these represented "loyal but weak" and "talented but arrogant," the contrast sharp enough that anyone could guess the intention.

The black tribunal's voice rose again, drifting across the illusions. "The third test is similar to your trial of character. In your sect, two disciples fight. One is loyal but weak. The other is talented but arrogant. Both approach you seeking justice. And from each of their perspectives, both believe themselves to be in the right. However, if you favor one, you inevitably render injustice to the other. You cannot satisfy both sides." The tribunal paused, letting the weight of the dilemma settle. "So tell me, Lan Zhen... in such a situation, whom do you favor? Do you still lean toward the loyal one?"

Mark didn't answer immediately. He stood with his arms crossed loosely, studying the two glowing silhouettes. Then, slowly, a small smile pulled at the corner of his lips as a thought came to his mind. He raised his eyes toward the tribunal, speaking with a relaxed confidence. "Your information is insufficient this time."

The shadows around the black tribunal stiffened, just subtly, almost like a raised eyebrow. "What?"

Mark continued, "You're assuming I must judge based on their perspectives. But if an incident happens, every person involved will always think they are right. That is the nature of conflict. Every conflict becomes two truths clashing. But I am the leader. I can not judge through the eyes of the disciples. I judge through my own." He stepped between the two silhouettes. "First, I must hear the entire incident, not the half-truths each disciple believes, but the objective situation. Only after I understand what happened from my perspective can I determine who is correct. Justice is not awarded based on loyalty

or talent. Justice is awarded based on truth. Forget about loyalty and arrogance. Even if one is an enemy that harmed me before, and the other is a loyal one, when they approach me for justice, when they truly believe in my judgment, and when I am judging them as the Sect Master... I will side with the one who is right...."

The tribunal chamber fell silent again. The swirling paint-colored cosmos around them seemed to dim, focusing only on Mark as he ended calmly.

"Once I decide whose stance is correct, I give justice, impartially, without bias toward loyalty or talent. And only after justice is given, if my loyal one needs kindness or guidance for repentance, I can offer that separately. But justice itself must be absolute. So before anything else, you must tell me the facts. What exactly happened?"

The black tribunal did not respond immediately. The two glowing silhouettes faded, dissolving into wisps like evaporating mist. Then, the entire space shuddered again, and the deep voice replied, "There is no situation needed. Your words... are enough. That alone is your answer."

The approval was unmistakable, quiet, but heavy and absolute.

The red tribunal stirred for the first time since the riddle began.

And then the black tribunal spoke, "Now for your fourth and final test of the trial of wisdom..."

The world twisted again.

Mark's vision blurred, colors melting into streaks of white and blue, until the cold hit him like a hammer.

When his sight cleared, he found himself standing atop a jagged mountain ridge. Frosty winds howled through the ice peaks, carrying flakes sharp enough to sting skin. The sky was a dull gray blanket, and the ground below stretched into a vast white desert, cold dunes of snow and ice.

All around him... people moved.

They were all sect disciples. Hundreds of them in number. And their faces looked tense, exhausted, fearful, determined, and every emotion that came with war.

Some tended to the wounded. Some sharpened weapons. Some reinforced makeshift barricades of frozen stone. And some simply stared forward toward the horizon, as if waiting for death to march toward them.

Mark felt a weight in his chest.

This... this felt real.

Then a voice echoed across the sky, resonating deep in the marrow of his bones, from the black tribunal.

"You stand in a war that has already occurred, challenger. This is a memory of the Ancient War of Ice and Fire tribes. You cannot fight. You cannot strike. You may only command."

Mark's brows knitted together.

The tribunal continued, "Your task is simple. End the Battle. Whether you lose or win, it doesn't matter. The only thing that matters is the result of the battle."

As the voice disappeared, snow crunched near him.

An elder appeared, robed in thick furs, beard covered in frost, with a face stern yet lined with worry. He bowed with cupped fists.

"Patriarch Lan," he greeted solemnly. "We await your orders. The Fire Tribes march from the southern dunes. Their force numbers at least six thousand. We... we have barely twelve hundred left standing."

Mark stared down the mountain.

In the far distance, like a line of crawling red ants beneath snowy dunes, glowing embers flickered.

No. Not embers.

It was flames.

It was like a red river of fire was approaching.

Mark exhaled slowly. "Give me the situation."

The elder nodded. "Their flames grow weaker in the current climate. Their breaths shorten, their bodies stiffen, and their movements slow. But their numbers... are overwhelming. If they push through one straight charge, we will be crushed by sheer force."

Mark crossed his arms and glanced around.

Mountains. Ice ridges. Frozen dunes. Narrow paths connecting one ridge to another like white bridges.

This terrain was perfect.

His mind spun through possibilities.

Prolong the battle.

Make the enemy exhaust themselves in the cold.

Split them, funnel them, crush them where they are weakest.

He turned to the elder. "Excellent. First order: pull back everyone from the southern ridge. I want no one waiting at the front."

The elder startled. "You want us to abandon the ridge? But that ridge blocks the main passage into the valley. If we leave it, "

"They'll take it," Mark finished calmly. "Yes, I know."

The elder hesitated. "Then why, "

"Because I want them to walk into it."

Confusion flickered across the elder's eyes. Mark didn't bother explaining. The elder would see it soon.

Mark raised his voice and shouted, "Signal captains! Full withdrawal from the southern front. Move everyone to the upper ridges. As soon as the Fire Tribes take the southern slope, collapse the snow banks. Trigger the first avalanche."

Soldiers blinked in shock, but they obeyed.

Throughout the peaks, horns blew. Disciples began moving in controlled waves, retreating along marked paths.

The elder trembled slightly, even though the wind was biting cold. "You intend to use the mountains... against them?"

Mark smiled faintly. "Mountains don't betray you, people do. Besides, the cold made this place our weapon."

Less than an hour later, the Fire Tribes stormed onto the southern ridge.

They moved like a blazing tide, their bodies wrapped in flames, their roars echoing through the snow. But close up, Mark could see it clearly; their flames sputtered in this freezing desert.

Their steps were heavy.

Their breaths were labored.

Their energy was cracking like old wood.

The moment they reached mid-slope, Mark raised his hand. "Now!"

Hundreds of disciples released icy blasts at the snow banks above them.

A thunderous crack shook the mountains at once, trembling the entire ridge.

And then, like a mountain god awakening, a massive avalanche swallowed the entire Fire Tribe vanguard.

Screams were muffled as thousands were buried under white death.

The elder beside Mark gasped. "By the heavens... You wiped out nearly half of their front!"

Mark didn't look satisfied. "Not enough. They still have four thousand left. Prepare the next deception."

\*

The enemy regrouped.

More flaming bodies surged across the dunes, but Mark noticed their patterns. Their formation was loose. They were fierce but not disciplined. Perfect for manipulation.

Mark ordered a sudden attack at the western pass.

A small squad rushed forward, fired arrows, unleashed ice spells, and then retreated fast.

The Fire Tribes roared and chased... straight into a narrow mountain throat.

Mark whispered, "Seal it."

Boom.

Two ice walls slammed down like jaws, trapping hundreds inside.

From above, disciples poured cold qi downward, freezing everything inside.

The elder murmured, "You... you are making them fight their surroundings instead of our men."

Mark's eyes stayed sharp. "War isn't about showing off. It's about increasing our survival rate as high as possible and defeating the enemy at the same time. Let the terrain do the killing."

"But Patriarch... the history..."

"Follow the orders," Mark cut him off before the elder spoke of nonsense about history books, bravery, and such BS. He wasn't raised with such noble etiquette to think that way.

\*

Night fell.

As the entire valley and mountains seemed to have fallen into silence, Mark's next move was launched.

"Send night raid teams that we put aside," he ordered. "Go in several teams, but only in small groups. Strike their camps, but don't try to kill or fight. Just disturb their sleep and try to burn their supplies."

The elder hesitated. "We usually avoid provoking them at night. And attacking in the night like this is cowardice..."

"And attacking us several times in numbers is a sign of bravery?" Mark said, using a stern tone. "Don't think about right or wrong. Cowardice or bravery. Follow my orders and win this war. We are going back home alive to our families, no matter what."

Under moonlight, twelve small squads descended the mountains. They shot freezing arrows into tents, collapsed burning wood onto supplies, cut water sacks, and vanished before the Fire Tribes reacted.

All night, the enemy roared in frustration.

Their morale fell.

Their unity crumbled.

Chapter 702: The Sect Head Trials (Part-8)

Just as Mark thought he would win, all of a sudden, the scenario changed when Mark woke up the next day after his brief nap.

They were no longer in Snow-capped mountains.

The air turned warm.

Snow melted rapidly.

A heat wave rolled across the dunes.

The entire place began to turn into a desert.

The Fire Tribes roared with renewed vigor as flames burst back to full strength.

Meanwhile, the black tribunal's voice boomed from the heavens: "Bravo Challenger, you managed to defeat the enemy before even the war properly began. Now, challenger... solve the original scenario of history when the Fire Tribes overpowered the Ice tribe."

Mark clenched his teeth. "Damn it."

But he wasn't rattled.

"Pull everyone back from the open dunes!" he commanded quickly. "Do not engage them in the open. Retreat to the caves and ice tunnels. Fire does nothing in enclosed, frozen spaces."

Captains immediately rushed to obey.

The Fire Tribes charged like blazing meteors, their morale soaring as the desert thawed, but the entrance to the mountains bottlenecked their movement.

Mark shouted, "Collapse the outer ridges! Make this valley a tunnel!"

Disciples struck the weakened ice pillars, causing huge sheets of frozen walls to fall. The mountains reshaped into narrow corridors.

Fire Tribe warriors smashed against the narrow entrance, only able to push through a few at a time.

Inside those tunnels... their flames dimmed again.

Mark called out, "Drench the paths! Make the floors ice!"

Water disciples poured qi and created slick sheets. Fire warriors slipped and crashed.

Ice disciples used the time to freeze them into blocks.

"Trap them. One by one. Don't fight head-on!"

\*

Hours passed.

One final group of Fire Tribes broke through their failing formations and charged into the valley's center, a frozen lake.

However, Mark waited for them there, with dozens of disciples still surviving.

He stared across the shimmering ice where their forces gathered.

The elder rushed to him. "Patriarch, the lake cannot hold them..."

"I know," Mark said simply.

The Fire Tribe commander pointed his flaming halberd at Mark, roaring, "Face me, coward!"

Mark ignored him.

He raised his arm.

"Disciples! Focus all attacks on the lake."

Qi surged in all sides at his orders.

Dozens, then hundreds of icy blasts hammered the frozen surface.

Cracks spiderwebbed beneath the Fire Tribe warriors.

The commander blinked in confusion.

Then the ice shattered.

The entire enemy force plunged into the freezing depths at once.

As steam rose, and screams of shock and pain exploded across the valley as cold water extinguished their flames, Mark lowered his hand and ordered.

"Now, freeze the lake."

A wave of cold qi surged from the mountains. Within seconds, the lake solidified again, trapping the enemy in ice forever.

Silence fell on the battlefield as hundreds of fire tribe cultivators were buried beneath the frozen lake.

The elder stared at Mark, stunned. Disciples broke out into disbelief, then relief, then laughter mixed with sobs.

"You... you saved us..." the elder whispered.

Mark simply crossed his arms behind his back and glanced at the sky, "What do you think?"

As if responding to his question, High above, the painted sky trembled.

The black tribunal's voice thundered: "Wisdom... acknowledged."

As a blinding flash of light enveloped Mark, he disappeared and once again found himself before the three tribunals. The black one's chest swelled with satisfaction, spreading his arms wide as if presenting him to the heavens.

"You are one excellent seedling," he boomed, the excitement could be heard in his words. "Never have I seen a challenger twist that war into victory, not once but twice. You have my full approval. Your wisdom is proven."

Mark breathed slowly. He didn't show pride, though inside he felt a small warmth of validation. It wasn't just because of passing the trial, it was because the war felt too real, as if people had actually lived and died there.

And then at last, the red one moved forward.

"Wisdom and character are the foundation," the red one declared in its usual distorted tone of both masculine and feminine. "These determine whether a sect head rules justly, whether he guides the sect without falling into corruption or selfishness. But strength..." The red one paused, and every color in the air dimmed slightly, as if even the fabric of this place feared its authority. "Strength is what makes others bow their heads. Strength is what prevents betrayal. Strength is what makes enemies hesitate before raising a blade against your sect. |

Mark waited patiently until the dialogue was finished.

But, the red tribunal continued to speak, "The head of the Ancient Lan Sect must be, without exception, the strongest among them. Your disciples must look at you and feel relief. Your elders must fear to move against you. Outsiders must tremble before challenging you. But you are too young to demand the same trial we demanded of your ancestors. Hence, we have adjusted the difficulty to your level for your last trial."

The black tribunal grunted in agreement. The white tribunal crossed her arms in approval, too.

The red one then leaned forward. "Your final trial is straightforward. You win, you live. You lose, you die. However, you have already passed two of the three trials and greatly impressed us. Hence, we are willing to give you an opportunity to leave, and leave you with an imprint so that you can come back for a challenge... Would you like to take the chance or would you like to fight? Make the choice, challenger."

Mark stared at him for a few seconds in silence and then said. "No, I would like to fight."

The red tribunal didn't say anything to that and curled its hand, "Very well. But we would like to give you one advantage, to choose your battle. You may choose your field," it offered. "Do you require flames? Forests? Mountains? Rivers? A realm filled with storms? Or absolute darkness? We will shape your battlefield according to your preference."

Mark didn't think long to answer that.

"Plain field," he said. "No obstructions. No terrain. Or tricks. Just make sure that I can see. That's much I expect."

The red tribunal's tone deepened. "So you choose a direct contest."

A faint, approving hum echoed from all three tribunals.

"Very well," the red tribunal stated. "Your battlefield will be a plain field, empty and bare."

It snapped its fingers.

And the world cracked open, once again.

One moment, Mark stood in the tribunal chamber, the next he was standing on an endless, barren plain that stretched toward every horizon. No mountains. No trees. Not even wind. It was just a silent, dead field beneath a bright sky, although with no sun or clouds.

Mark rolled his shoulders once and stretched his fingers, ready for the battle.

And then, a few moments later, a knight clad in black armor materialized step by step. The knight stood a full head taller than him, with broader body, rigid posture, and terrifyingly steady.

Mark murmured under his breath, "Eyes of God."

Lines of data scrolled across his vision:

[Supreme Adamantium Forge]

Rank: Peak 13-Circle

Type: Battle Puppet

Element: None

Description: The battle puppet was made of 96% adamantine metal, the strongest metal in the material universe, forged in the heart of a dying star. It cannot be destroyed by attacks lower than 13.0 stats.

However, due to the lack of a special core or any soul, it carries no elements or any skills, and neither can it be graded. Just contained pure strength.

\*

Mark whistled softly. "You're kidding me. An adamantite puppet? This thing is top-tier even by the Dominion's standards, adjusting the difficulty, my ass. But then again, it didn't have any energy either. That means it is just a weakling. As long as I have the No Touch skill on, it won't be able to touch me. Ha... what a joke.."

The red tribunal's voice then boomed across the barren land.

"The rules are simple, Lan Zhen. There are no rules. Survive and pass. Or die and fail."

Mark nodded. "I know."

He also figured out the real reason why his great-grandfather sent him. It is not just to fail him. If he dies here, it would look like fate, not murder. And no one would blame Lan Yujin either.

He exhaled quietly. "Regardless, you underestimate, Lan Yujin. This is not even in the same league as the Demon Cat Empress."

And then as the puppet raised its sword, which was a massive black blade forged of the same metal as its armor, the red tribunal's voice echoed:

"The trial begins... now."

Chapter 703: The Sect Head Trials (Part-9)

"The Trial begins... now."

As soon as the voice echoed in the surroundings, Mark lifted his hand slightly and muttered, "No-touch toggle on."

Inside his mind, Ark responded with crisp neutrality.

[Passive Skill: No-Touch, Activated.]

A faint ripple spread across his skin, almost invisible unless someone looked closely.

This ability, as humble as it sounded, was one of the most broken defensive skills in his arsenal.

It created a microscopic dimensional distortion surrounding his body; anything that tried to touch him simply failed unless it carried the power to defy even the laws of this universe. Only 15-circle realm and above beings have such power.

The puppet did not know this.

But then again, the puppet did not care.

As the trial began, the black knight launched forward, its heavy armor producing a shockwave each time its feet struck the earth. It moved impossibly fast for something so heavily armored. With its entire body made of adamantium, it would weigh over 10 tons, and yet, its speed was hypersonic, to the point that even Mark could not see its figure properly. However, he wasn't worried. He stood there, waiting for the puppet.

The puppet reached Mark within a breath. Its sword rose like a black crescent, and with a loud metallic scream, it swung down at Mark, intending to cut him into two halves.

However, the sword struck the invisible barrier with a deafening clang, and then the blade bounced off violently, the impact sending a small tremor through the plain.

The knight paused as if confused, then immediately stepped back and swung again with more force, and then again, trying to find a weakness.

Each strike was a strike made to kill, even a 14-circle. Each strike could shatter mountains. But to the No-Touch barrier, they were nothing more than taps on a window.

As if it had realized it, the puppet finally stopped attacking.

It ran away and created a distance and raised its helm slightly, before stretching the sword above its head. So, instead of attacking him with the sword itself, it intended to swing down the sword with all of its strength to release a wave of energy at its opponent.

And as soon as Mark saw that it raised its sword high above, he realized that. "So, not a dumb one, after all."

Just as the puppet was about to swing down, Mark lifted his palm.

"Activate, Attraction"

At once, a heavy suctional force emerged from his body. The Adamantine Knight flew toward him without being able to control its body. It tried to stop the attack by stabbing the sword into the ground on the way, but the suction force was too much for the puppet. If it had been a 14-circle puppet, it wouldn't have worked, but alas, Mark's 7 points of luck worked in his favor.

And the moment the puppet neared him, Mark unleashed his next move, consuming half of his reserves.

"Activate, Singularity."

A black dot appeared in the center of his palm, and then in the next moment, a violent pull surged outward. The puppet couldn't even escape at such close range, and in the time it took to blink, the entire black knight, armor, sword, and all, was yanked off its feet, vanishing completely into Mark's hand before getting destroyed inside the space.

Silence followed.

Real, profound silence, this time.

Then the illusion cracked like broken glass. The barren plain dissolved piece by piece, replaced by the otherworldly tribunal space once again. The swirling colors returned, and the three tribunals stood there staring at Mark.

If they had faces, their expressions would've been stunned.

The black tribunal let out a loud, almost childlike whoop. "Amazing! Just amazing! That was the fastest anyone has ever destroyed the founder's puppet. You crushed it like it was a child's toy! Hah! This is truly interesting!"

The white tribunal looked at the red one, clearly unsettled. "Red... shouldn't you have chosen something stronger? That was hardly a test. He finished before I could even blink."

The red tribunal's tone, however, was strange, somewhere between resignation and disbelief. "That was the strongest puppet under the third stage of transcendence. There is nothing stronger that we are allowed to use for this trial. I merely used a trick to lie to our challenger."

A heavy silence fell before the red tribunal continued.

It turned to Mark, leaning forward as though studying him from head to toe.

"Challenger Lan Zhen... you have passed all three trials of this stage. You have proven your character, your wisdom, and your strength. There is no doubt, you are worthy of becoming the Head of the Ancient Lan Sect."

The distorted voice softened, becoming more solemn.

"However... there is one more. It was something that our Creator has passed on to us. Whoever passes all three trials shall be given an opportunity to proceed to the inheritance trials. However, this is strictly optional. You may proceed with it, if you are interested, or you may leave with the token and also the treasure the white tribunal promised to bestow upon you."

The red tribunal lowered its head.

"Will you accept?"

Mark stared at the red tribunal, knitting his brows as he repeated the words slowly, "Inheritance trials?"

The red tribunal inclined its faceless head. "Yes. The inheritance trial carries the legacy left behind by the founder of the Ancient Lan Sect. It is a trial that only those who pass the three core tests may challenge. It is not required for you to become sect head, but those who clear it obtain more than just authority. They receive the founder's knowledge and his true inheritance."

The moment the red tribunal spoke the last part, Mark felt something inside him tighten, as though the air had suddenly become heavier around him.

He wasn't sure why.

Perhaps it was the strange coincidence of the founder's name matching his own past-life name, or perhaps it was the way the tribunals' voices subtly shifted when speaking about it, almost reverent.

But uncertain or not, he wasn't the kind of man who would hesitate.

"Alright," Mark said with a grin forming on his lips, "I'll take it. Inheritance trial or whatever you call it, I'm in."

"Very well..."

As the Red tribunal glanced at the black tribunal and then the white, both of them nodded, and the three tribunals lifted their arms in perfect synchronicity.

Their fabric-like bodies began to glow, white like dawn, black like abyss, red like blood and fire. Slowly, they formed a circular portal suspended above the ground. The portal shimmered with three colors, always shifting but never mixing.

"Go," the three voices blended as one. "Beyond this portal lies the trial left behind by the founder. Pass it, and you will inherit his truths. Fail... and you will return with nothing."

Mark didn't bother to hesitate.

He stepped forward and walked straight into the portal.

The world dissolved instantly, like wet paint melting down a canvas, and then just as quickly, it reformed.

Mark found himself standing on a completely plain, smooth stone floor, almost as if someone had polished it endlessly until even dust refused to settle.

In front of him, a staircase made from the same white stone rose, going upwards to somewhere.

He had only taken a breath when a sharp ding rang out through the completely empty space.

Mark's eyes widened as a massive holographic panel materialized above him, clean, crisp, floating at a perfect angle like his own system interface.

[FLOOR 0, Please head upstairs.]

Mark blinked once. Then twice.

"What the hell?" he muttered. "Ark... you didn't do this, right?"

The AI's voice echoed in his mind, calm as always.

[Negative, Master.]

Mark rubbed his forehead, staring at the giant holographic panel again. "Why does this look like the inside of a video game? Don't tell me the founder was secretly a modern guy too..."

A brief silence followed, and Mark couldn't stop the strange feeling creeping into him. The only thing pushing away the idea that the founder was like him was the unmistakable language displayed.

Rather than English or Earth languages, it was Orlon, the universal script spoken here, the script he used back on Earth-192 and in Lan Sect. If the founder had been a transmigrator like him, the trial would have felt different. So he pushed aside the thought and exhaled.

"Alright then... let's see what this is about..." He rolled his shoulders once and took the stairs.

The moment he stepped onto the next level, another holographic screen flashed into existence.

[FLOOR 1, Kill the monsters to clear the floor.]

Chapter 704: The Inheritance Trial (Part-1)

[FLOOR 1, Kill the monsters to clear the floor.]

Mark stared at it blankly. Then he looked around cautiously. The room was empty, still the same polished stone floor without a single piece of furniture or decoration.

"Well," Mark muttered, "let's see which monsters I would face."

He had barely finished speaking when the air rippled. Within ten seconds, five creatures materialized out of thin space.

They looked like monstrous black hounds, each the size of a small bus, their eyes glowing red as they opened their flaming jaws. Twin plumes of fire spilled out with every breath, and the air temperature instantly spiked.

Ark's voice rang in Mark's consciousness.

[Scan complete. Realm: 9th-circle. Variant Fire Hellhounds.]

"Perfect warm-up," Mark murmured.

He summoned his adamantite assault rifle with a flick of his wrist from his inventory. The moment the metallic weight settled into his hand, he aimed directly at the pack.

\*Woof\*

The hellhounds barked and charged at him with frightening speed, smashing the stone floor with their paws on the way.

But Mark calmly squeezed the trigger.

Fifty rounds of adamantite bullets left the muzzle in less than three seconds. The hellhounds' bodies ruptured with each impact. One's head exploded outright. Another was torn open through the ribs. A third lost half its torso before collapsing.

The fight lasted fewer seconds than the time it took for the monsters to appear.

When the final bullet left the chamber, all five hellhounds were already dissolving into black mist.

Mark lowered the rifle and exhaled lightly.

"Alright then. Floor one cleared. Let's see how many more floors this founder of ours cooked up."

He stepped forward, ready for whatever the next floor would bring.

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The holographic screen flickered once, and glowing letters rippled across its surface.

[Level 1 cleared. Please proceed upstairs to Floor 2.]

A new staircase unfolded from the ground, as if the stone itself were shifting to accommodate his path. Mark raised a brow at that. Every single movement in this tower felt too smooth, too responsive, almost like someone had built it using a modern gaming engine rather than ancient runic formations.

"Alright then... Floor 2," Mark muttered, patting the side of his assault rifle before climbing.

As soon as he stepped onto the next platform, the surroundings shimmered and rearranged themselves. The flat arena remained, but a layer of frost spread out beneath his feet. The air temperature plummeted a bit.

Then the monsters materialized.

Three wolves, each one enormous, towering above him. Their claws were thick and sharp like sculpted glacier shards, and cold steam rose from their mouths as they snarled. All three bore the unmistakable aura of 10-circle demigod realm beasts this time.

Ark scanned them instantly.

[Frostfang Direwolves, Realm: Demigod. Attribute: Ice]

One of the wolves wasted no time in attacking. Its chest swelled, and in the next moment, a concentrated torrent of pale-blue frost exploded outward. The icy breath engulfed the entire chamber, freezing the floor, the walls, and even the air itself gave birth to an icicle shower. Everything turned white, everything except Mark.

The frost washed over him harmlessly, breaking into harmless motes of glittering snowflakes the moment it touched his body.

"Yeah," Mark murmured with a dry chuckle, "you're not freezing someone blessed by the Blizzard Pegasus. Nice attempt though."

The wolves didn't wait. They lunged as one, massive paws crunching against the frozen ground, jaws snapping with a force strong enough to shatter steel.

Mark didn't bother dodging this time.

He simply lifted the assault rifle, aimed in their general direction, and squeezed the trigger.

Fifty adamantine rounds tore through the air once again, like lightning.

But unlike the small hellhounds earlier, these beasts were larger, much larger, and his shots struck at scattered angles.

Instead of killing them outright, the bullets ripped through their flesh and embedded deep into their bodies. The effect was immediate: Adamantine's overwhelming density dragged their bodies down, and the internal damage caused their limbs to momentarily stiffen.

The wolves staggered, howling in pain and anger.

One collapsed onto its front legs, its movement jerky.

Another shook violently, trying to expel the foreign metal but failing.

The third attempted another ice breath, but the instability inside its body disrupted the technique halfway.

Mark tapped the magazine release calmly, which clattered to the frozen floor.

He slid in another fresh one without a single wasted movement on the wounded beasts that couldn't move.

"Round two," he murmured, raising the rifle again.

The second storm of bullets roared through the chamber.

This time, none of them were left alive.

Mark lowered the rifle, exhaled once, and let the magazine drop again. "Okay... Floor 2. Not bad."

A familiar ding echoed overhead as another holographic screen glowed into existence.

[Level 2 cleared. Please proceed upstairs.]

Mark glanced up the next staircase as it unfurled smoothly from the frozen ground. The sight actually made him grin.

"Alright, Founder," he muttered under his breath, "let's see what other game levels you've left behind."

With rifle in hand and steady steps, he walked toward Floor 3.

He took a steady breath and climbed, rifle slung casually at his side.

Floor 3 materialized around him with a howl.

This time, seven Frost Wolf Queens appeared, all of them towering beasts with icy manes and regal but violent auras. Each one bore the strength of a demigod. The moment they emerged, all seven drew in breath. Their chests expanded, in order to release Ice breath all together, just like on the previous floor where only one did it.

Mark didn't bother to say anything this time. The moment the icy glow ignited in their throats, he activated his skill.

"Gravity Dome, 5000G."

At once, a ripple spread out from him. Their legs buckled instantly as the gravity dome was activated, before their bodies flattening as if an invisible mountain pressed down on them. Ice breath dispersed harmlessly into muffled coughs as their lungs were crushed tight.

Mark then raised his assault rifle.

He emptied a full magazine, fifty adamantine rounds, straight into the pinned wolves. The bullets tore through fur, muscle, and skull, embedding inside their bodies. The beasts convulsed helplessly under the dome.

He didn't stop.

A second magazine followed, then a third. When the final wolf's struggling ceased, all seven dissolved into pale frost flakes.

The holographic screen appeared overhead.

[Floor 3 cleared. Proceed upstairs.]

Mark exhaled, rotated his shoulders, and began climbing again.

Floor 4 greeted him with a thunderous roar.

The chamber was smaller this time, or maybe the creature inside simply felt too large.

It was a giant cyclops, towering at least fifty feet, standing in the center. Its single eye glared with eerie blue light, and a massive club rested in its hands. This one was in the 11th circle.

The cyclops spotted him and charged immediately, the entire floor trembling with each step.

Mark didn't bother moving and unleashed the same skill.

"Gravity Dome, 20000g."

The giant collapsed instantly, legs snapping under the pressure. Its body hit the ground with a boom that shook loose frost from the ceiling. The beast roared and thrashed, but the multiplied weight glued it to the floor.

Mark raised the rifle, walked closer, and pointed directly at the cyclops's massive face.

He fired.

The first bullet cracked the creature's skull. The next few punched through the eye. By the time the magazine was empty, the cyclops was nothing but melting mist. One magazine, fifty rounds, was all it took.

The screen blinked again.

[Floor 4 cleared.]

Floor 5 was less generous.

Three cyclopes now stood waiting for him. They roared together, shaking the ground until pebbles danced at Mark's feet. All were identical, same height, same weapons, and same blazing single eye. The chamber was larger than before, allowing them to spread out and coordinate.

Mark stepped forward calmly.

"Gravity Dome."

All three slammed down at once, their roars muffled as their chests compressed under the weight. Their clubs dropped from their hands, rolling away like fallen tree trunks.

This time, Mark walked among them with unhurried steps, raising his rifle and emptying magazines one by one. Three cyclopes. Three magazines.

He didn't even break a sweat.

[Floor 5 cleared.]

And then came Floor 6.

The moment he ascended, a heavy pressure filled the chamber. Seven cyclopes, each one fiercer than the previous batch, stood towering before him. Their eyes glowed brighter, their clubs crackled faintly with energy, and their roar was loud enough to shake Mark's bones.

He sighed.

"Of course. Seven now."

They charged simultaneously, each swing strong enough to tear mountains apart. But before their clubs even fell, Mark expanded the Gravity Dome again.

Chapter 705: The Inheritance Trial (Part-2)

The effect was immediate and brutal. Seven giants slammed into the floor, bodies cracking under the multiplied weight. Their clubs shattered on impact, breaking like cheap wooden sticks.

Seven magazines, one per cyclops.

It was bloody, methodical work, and Mark did it with the same calmness someone used to clean their desk.

When the last giant turned to mist, the holographic display shimmered before him again.

[Floor 6 cleared. Proceed to Floor 7.]

A staircase unfolded once more.

Mark cracked his neck and exhaled. "If this is only Floor 6... I wonder how many more there are."

And with absolute confidence, he stepped upward.

\*

By the time Mark reached the seventh staircase, he could feel the subtle fatigue in his shoulders.

It wasn't exhaustion in the normal sense; his body was far too strong for that, but his wrists and arms carried the faint vibration of firing hundreds of adamantine rounds in rapid succession.

Even with enhanced strength, adamantine bullets had a kick, and after six straight floors, the recoil was finally settling in.

Mark rolled his shoulders once, cracked his neck, and let out a slow breath. "Alright... let's go big," he muttered as he began climbing the stairs.

The moment he stepped onto Floor 7, heat washed over him in a suffocating wave. The scenery looked nothing like the icy walls of the earlier levels. Instead, jagged basalt pillars rose from the floor, glowing with faint magma veins. The entire chamber shimmered in red-gold light.

Hovering in the center was a massive beast, long, sleek, and beautiful in the most destructive way. A 12-circle monster, Fire Dragon. Its scales were crimson plates edged with molten gold, and every breath it took caused sparks to drip from its nostrils like falling embers.

And the dragon didn't wait to study him.

The moment its golden pupil locked onto Mark, it let out a roar that rattled the entire chamber, then immediately opened its jaws.

A vast sea of flame erupted outward, swallowing half the chamber in blinding, violent fire, hot enough to melt the basalt platforms under Mark's feet.

Mark's reaction, however, was instant.

"Energy Shield!"

A brilliant scarlet dome of ether snapped around him just as the inferno reached him. Flames battered the shield like a hurricane, pounding it with continuous force.

Mark felt his ether draining rapidly.

He clenched his jaw. "Damn, that's a lot hotter than I expected. At this rate, I can't maintain the reserves. The rate of discharge is far higher than recovery. Anyway, let's press it."

He dropped the shield the moment he saw the dragon inhale again.

And acted.

"Gravity Dome, 50000g, activate."

The invisible field snapped into existence, slamming the dragon down like a falling mountain.

The fire cut off mid-breath, as though someone had clamped its throat shut. Its wings slapped uselessly against the ground, sparks bursting from the impact. The massive beast writhed, screeching in fury as its bones strained under the crushing density.

Mark didn't rush.

Something flashed in his mind, a sudden, stupid, but intriguing idea.

"Taming Skill, Activate."

A glowing golden rope shot from his hand, wrapping around the dragon's neck and snout like a divine lasso. For a split second, Mark saw hope; maybe he could tame a fire dragon from a legendary founder's trial? That would be an insane gain.

But the rope disintegrated almost instantly.

[Notification: Target is not a real monster entity. Taming Skill does not apply.]

Mark sighed heavily, shoulders deflating. "Damn... that would've been cool."

Disappointment lasted one second.

Then he shrugged. "Oh well. Time for the big guns."

He summoned his soul weapon at last, the twin antimatter guns. The moment they formed in his hands, the dragon sensed danger and struggled harder, its wings beating in a frenzy, tail slamming uselessly into the floor. It managed to raise its head an inch under the crushing gravity, just enough to roar.

Mark raised both guns, aiming at it.

He fired.

The antimatter blasts struck the dragon's side like tiny suns colliding with flesh. Each impact triggered annihilation, erasing scales, flesh, and bone molecule by molecule. The dragon thrashed violently, its screams melting into static-like distortion as its body dissolved under the barrage.

Meanwhile, Mark kept a shield around himself to block the shockwaves and the Gamma rays. Explosions blossomed around him like miniature novas, each one lighting up the chamber.

He didn't stop until the dragon finally disintegrated completely, leaving behind nothing to see.

"Alright... Floor 7 down." Mark lowered his guns as the holographic screen appeared above him for the 7th time

[Floor 7 cleared. Proceed to Floor 8.]

Mark flexed his fingers once, then cracked his knuckles and sighed with a crooked smile.

"If Floor 7 gave me a dragon... what's waiting next?"

With confident steps, he walked toward the next staircase as the room dissolved behind him.

\*

Mark expected the ninth floor to be harder. Maybe multiple dragons...

But Floor 8 has another single dragon, this time a white-scaled Ice Dragon that was breathing frigid storms. It wasn't as troublesome as the fire one. Mark had used the same method, gravity dome, antimatter shots, and patience, until the beast collapsed into frozen chunks scattered across the room. Efficient, clean, no drama.

Then, instead of rushing upward, Mark finally sat down on the cold floor. He let out a long exhale and leaned against the wall. His stamina was fine, but his mind needed a breather. Especially after using antimatter energy twice in a row.

He opened his inventory and pulled out a steaming bowl of noodles. He ate slowly, savoring the taste; the warmth spread through his body, soothing the last hints of fatigue.

After finishing the bowl and drinking the soup down to the last drop, he sat quietly for a few more minutes, letting his heartbeat normalize and recovering his ether reserves completely. The silence helped. The calm helped even more.

Finally, he stood up, brushed imaginary dust from his clothes, and murmured, "Alright. Floor 9. Let's see what's waiting."

He expected a powerful monster. He was even prepared to face a 14-circle monster, too.

But as he stepped onto the ninth floor, little did he expect to be frozen in surprise as he stared at the monster, his next opponent.

Standing in the center of the massive circular arena was a creature he had seen once before, in the real world, standing before his entire clan.

It was a majestic, silver-white creature, the size of a regular horse, with a long, luminous mane that drifted like clouds. Its hooves were crystalline, and every step left behind a brief ripple of frost. Its wings, large and elegant, folded neatly along its body.

Blizzard Pegasus.

Rank: 14-circle (peak stage)

Attribute: Divine/Primordial Ice

\*

Mark's pupils shrank at the sight of the 14-circle being.

He subconsciously raised his guard... until the beast turned its head and spoke. "Hello there, Human."

Mark froze mid-step. His fingers twitched, but then he took a deep breath, "Uh... hello," he answered awkwardly, blinking rapidly. "You can talk?"

The pegasus snorted lightly, frost mist trailing from its nostrils. "Why is that surprising? Just because those mindless beasts on lower floors could not speak does not mean none of us can."

Mark cleared his throat. "Fair point."

The pegasus examined him slowly, sniffing the air once. Its expression shifted from curiosity to mild disbelief.

"I can sense it," the pegasus then murmured. "Your realm is only... transcendence. Not even the first stage. And yet you managed to reach here."

Mark rubbed his neck and muttered, "Well... I have tricks up my sleeve."

The Pegasus lowered its head slightly, nostrils flaring again. "Strange. Your body carries many elements. Fire, wind, lightning, earth... and something far more ancient. I also smell a familiar trace." The pegasus paused, then added calmly, "I smell my mother's bloodline inside you."

Mark blinked. His mouth opened slightly. "Your mother?"

The Pegasus nodded. "Yes. The Blizzard Pegasus Queen. You received her blessing, did you not? I can recognize her aura immediately."

Mark replied, "I received her blessing, but mostly inherited the bloodline from my ancestors."

The pegasus stared at him for a while longer, as if inspecting every inch of him. Then it asked, "What is your name, Human?"

Mark answered simply. "Lan Zhen."

The pegasus frowned immediately. "A lie."

Mark raised both eyebrows. "Uh... excuse me?"

"That is not your name," The divine beast insisted. "At least, that's what you believe."

Chapter 706: The Inheritance Trial (Part-3)

Mark sighed and waved a hand. "It's my official name in the clan. My birth name is different."

The pegasus tilted its head thoughtfully. "I see. That explains the dissonance." It paused, then said with unexpected gentleness, "Then tell me, Human... what is the name that you liked to be called?"

Mark hesitated. His real name, Mark Spencer, echoed in his mind. Was it relevant? Would this creature even understand? But something in the Pegasus's gaze told him that he might not be able to fool it.

He inhaled lightly.

Mark didn't need to think about it. His birth name, his identity, and his past life, they were all tangled together now. He had been Lu Zhen. He was Lan Zhen. But at the core, the name that belonged to his soul was only one.

"Mark Spencer," he said plainly. "Same as the clan founder."

For a moment, the Pegasus froze mid-breath, as though something unexpected shifted in the mana around them.

"Mark... Spencer?" it repeated slowly, head tilting in confusion. "That is... a strange coincidence. No, perhaps too strange. But you look nothing like him."

But Frost let the surprise fade, returning to its composed focus. "Very well. Then let us see whether you are worthy of that name or not."

It flapped its wings lightly, the feathers shimmering like snow under sunlight. "Do you require any preparation?"

Mark shook his head. "No need." He lifted both arms, and twin Adamantine Guns materialized in his hands. "I'm ready."

The Pegasus's gaze hardened. "Those weapons..." It leaned forward slightly, nostrils expanding as it sniffed. "Such vile energy. Not demonic, not divine... anti-divine? No, worse. It feels like even the heavens themselves are its enemy."

Mark didn't deny it. "They're antimatter," he said. "Perfectly dangerous. Perfectly efficient."

The Pegasus didn't answer. It simply spread its wings wide and launched itself upward with a powerful flap, soaring several meters above the arena floor. A cold storm rolled behind it as if the winds themselves bowed to its presence.

Mark muttered, "Too slow," and then whispered the command: "Gravity Dome... max output. One hundred thousand G."

The effect was instant.

The room trembled while the air collapsed inward like an invisible boulder crushing space itself.

The Pegasus' wings stopped mid-beat, the majestic creature dropped out of the sky like a stone, and slammed onto the floor with a thunderous impact, and frost mist burst outward from the sudden pressure.

But Frost wasn't that weak that it could collapse under gravity.

Even under 100,000g, the Blizzard Pegasus still managed to stand on its leg, scream in defiance.

\*Neigh\*

A pulse of icy aura exploded from its body, crashing straight into Mark. He reacted instantly, raising an energy shield in time to block the impact. The force blasted him backward regardless, skidding him across the icy ground.

He exhaled sharply. "Alright... that hurt."

Before he could stabilize, the Pegasus lifted its head with intense fury in its glowing eyes. Its mouth opened, unleashing an immense beam of Absolute Freezing that erupted, blanketing the entire chamber in a sheet of instant frost. Walls, ceiling, ground, everything froze over in a thick layer of crystalline ice.

It was such a similar scenario.

Everything was frozen... except Mark.

The blast washed over him harmlessly.

The Pegasus's eyes widened in disbelief. "Impossible. Human, you, how are you unaffected by Absolute Freezing? Even with my mother's blessing, you should not be immune to this level. Only her direct descendants could..." It cut itself off. "But you are clearly human."

Mark smirked to himself, thinking. "Well, that's the magic of the system."

Ark hummed in his head mockingly. Master, that was the system. Obviously.

Mark ignored the AI and lowered his guns suddenly, letting them fade. The Pegasus's ears flicked upward.

"You are... giving up those weapons?"

"No," Mark replied, raising an empty hand. "I'm switching tactics."

He summoned Unnamed instead from the inventory, the brocade-shaped voidstone box, into his hand. It gleamed faintly under the icy light. Then he activated Density Manipulation, boosting its weight to the absurd level where even mountains would crack beneath it.

With a steady stance, Mark pulled his arm back.

"I hope you're durable."

Then he threw it.

The box shot forward like a meteor, tearing through the cold air with a sonic crack. The Pegasus reacted instantly, opening its mouth and unleashing an enormous breath of ice directly at the incoming projectile. The frosty beam hit Unnamed in full force, engulfing it entirely in blinding white.

However, the box didn't stop.

It simply slowed slightly, like a tank trudging through snow, before piercing through the blast entirely and smashing straight into its face, creating a powerful shockwave.

The Pegasus's head jerked sideways, and the mighty beast flew across the chamber, crashing into the ground and rolling several meters before coming to a trembling stop.

While it seemed like a powerful attack, an attack Mark used to kill peak-13-circle Leviathan in the netherworld, he saw that it only left a bruise on this Pegasus.

Mark blinked. "That... didn't work at all? How strong was this thing? Earlier, even 100k times the gravity didn't work on it. Hmm... wait a second..."

Suddenly, something clicked in his head. The Pegasus was the first monster that ever talked to him during this entire trial. It even calls the clan founder its master, and since this place is real and not some spiritual realm, then it is not simply a spirit either...

"Ark, check if this is a real monster or an illusion."

A moment later...

\*Ding!

[Yes, Master. That one is real.]

Mark's eyes lit up.

"Finally," he muttered. "That means I can tame this one... but can I truly do it? Well, let's try and see then..."

He took off in a burst of speed, catching Unnamed with a smooth motion as he passed by it. The Pegasus groaned, shaking its head as it pushed itself up, flaring its wings in instinctive readiness.

But before the Pegasus could fully regain its balance under the extreme gravity, Mark was already in front of it, standing eye-to-eye with the divine beast.

"Oh?" The Pegasus said, its voice still pained yet tinged with admiration. "You move fast, Mark Spencer."

Mark tightened his grip on Unnamed.

In response, twin beams of ice burst forth, not from its mouth, but straight from her eyes. The frigid beams cut across the chamber in razor-thin lines, sharp enough to freeze space itself.

But Mark had already vanished from its sight.

The next moment, he flickered into existence behind the monster, reappearing mid-air using his Short Teleportation technique, and swung Unnamed down like a heavenly hammer.

The box struck the monster's back with a sound akin to mountains colliding. The Pegasus didn't just fall; she was blasted away, thrown across the chamber like a catapulted boulder, and smashed into the wall.

Mark didn't allow a single breath of recovery. He activated Short Teleportation again, reappearing above the monster before gravity even reclaimed her falling body. With both hands gripping Unnamed, he swung downward. The blow connected with its face, slamming its head deep into the floor and creating a crater beneath it.

But the Pegasus wasn't defeated yet. In a burst of instinctive fury, it tried to kick upward with its front hooves with a terrifying force, containing the equivalent strength of a 14-circle realm being.

\*Boom\*

Mark's body was thrown through the air like a rag doll. His body soared nearly a hundred meters back before smashing into the opposite wall and sliding down slowly, coughing violently as he knelt.

"Damn..." he hissed after coughing a mouthful of blood, holding his ribs. "Just one kick is enough to shatter my bones... Even that 99% damage reduction is enough to protect myself... ugh..."

He forced himself to stand, with a trembling body. The Pegasus was already rising as well, shaking the dust off its mane, with its eyes burning with both anger and reluctant respect.

Mark then took a shaky breath. "I was careless. I should've waited until the Disintegration skill cooldown ended. Now... I can only use that move." He looked at his hands grimly. "But if I use it, I'll be in the blast radius. And I might die."

He exhaled through his teeth, smirking faintly. "But it's fine. I still have seven lives left. However, to use that skill, I need to release its constraints and time it perfectly."

He was about to dismiss the Gravity Dome, intending to restore his ether energy to full. The antimatter beam required exactly 100% ether reserve; anything less and the attack would lose its absolute destructive force. He prepared to deactivate the dome,

But the Pegasus didn't give him the time to prepare.

#### Chapter 707: The Inheritance Trial (Part-4)

The divine beast opened its mouth and released a long, shrill neigh. A surge of strange mana filled the chamber, shimmering like translucent threads of energy.

Then, the light formed shapes, two translucent versions of itself, identical in form but made entirely of pure elemental energy.

Mark's eyes widened in surprise. "Oh, come on, now you can clone yourself too?"

The two energy clones didn't hesitate. They tore through the air, unaffected by the crushing gravitational pressure, and lunged straight at Mark with icy ferocity.

"Shit," Mark spat. He didn't have time to think. His hands flew into position, activating a skill. "Lightning clones, go!"

Two crackling figures of blue lightning burst from his body and sprinted forward, looking exactly the same as himself too. They collided with the beast's translucent clones mid-air.

And just when they collided, Mark mumbled, "Explode."

And in an instant, his two lightning clones flashed and transformed into condensed lightning energy, before exploding into a blast

The blast that followed was like a miniature supernova.

The entire chamber shook. The shockwave expanded outward with enough force to distort the walls themselves. Mark was caught at the edge of the detonation, while the Blizzard Pegasus took the brunt of the reflected explosion.

Mark unfurled his icy wings, just in time. They expanded outward, encasing him to act as a shield. The blast slammed into him, but the wings held, absorbing most of the impact. Even then, Mark's feet were pushed backward along the floor, and his arms trembled from the vibration.

Across the chamber, the Pegasus staggered. The divine beast's breath came out cold and ragged as the explosion had burned away half its ethereal mane and cracked one of its icy armor plates.

But its eyes?

They were still sharp.

Still proud.

Still burning with the will to fight.

Mark lowered his wings slowly, breathing heavily. "Damn... that was too close."

The monster lifted its head, exhaling frost. "You... continue to surprise me, human."

Mark pushed himself off the cracked wall and steadied his breath. His entire body ached, and even his regenerative physique felt sluggish after the brutal exchange.

Across the chamber, the Blizzard Pegasus shook the lingering sparks of lightning and ice from its ethereal mane.

She rose slowly, its hooves carving deep prints into the stone floor. Though she bled divine energy from several wounds, she still stared at Mark with a frightening resolve, as if refusing to accept defeat even while inching toward collapse.

Then its opened its mouth opened its mouth once more, gathering an enormous amount of energy. The swirling frostlight inside its throat formed a concentrated beam, one capable of freezing the very laws of nature.

Mark clenched his teeth. He didn't have the strength left to block another one. He had no choice.

He dismissed the Gravity Dome.

The oppressive pressure vanished instantly, and with it, Frost's movements regained sharpness. Mark felt ether pulsing back into his body at a rapid pace, recovering the lost reserves. He stared at the invisible counter that only he could sense. Seventy-four percent... seventy-nine... eighty-three...

He needed at least ninety for the antimatter beam, if he had to go for a sure kill. But the Pegasus wasn't going to give him time.

At eighty-six percent, the divine beast fired with the blinding beam of frost that shot forward like a celestial cannon. The floor beneath it froze and shattered instantly.

"F\*\*k." Mark's pupils contracted. With no hesitation, he invoked Short Teleportation. His body flickered, vanishing from the beam's direct path and reappearing above its head with a sharp snap of displaced air.

The Pegasus jerked its head upward in shock as Mark had whispered the command.

"Activate... Antimatter Beam."

In the next instant, without needing any casting time, a blinding lance of annihilation erupted from his palm.

There was no sound, only a violent, devouring burst as space folded and ruptured around the impact.

At point-blank range, the antimatter beam consumed everything. The pegasus screamed as the blast tore through its divine body, and the floor beneath it detonated into dust. The chamber collapsed in a thunderous implosion as antimatter ate through stone, ice, and mana alike.

Then time froze.

Quite literally, as a spell was activated on the floor.

The shattered walls stopped mid-collapse.

The dust particles hung suspended.

The cracks in space halted like paused ripples. The trial dimension's laws reasserted themselves and began rebuilding the chamber, rewinding destruction piece by piece, restoring pillars, sealing ruptures, and resetting the terrain until the arena stood whole again.

When time resumed its flow, only two figures lay on the remade floor, one was near death, and other... well... in the state of a corpse

\*Ding!

[You died.]

Mark's body didn't move for several seconds.

Then...

[Phoenix Bloodline Trait Activated: Instant Resurrection]

[Death Count: 3]

[Remaining Lives: 6]

[Primeval Bloodline Detected. No side effects imposed]

A faint glow pulsed from his heart. His shattered bones realigned. His torn flesh reweave itself. A burst of heat washed over him as he drew a sharp breath and opened his eyes with a pained groan.

"Ugh... damn... that was more painful than before... I guess it's because the last two times I died... I didn't willingly die."

Seeing the notifications still hovering in the corner of his vision, Mark let out a long exhale. He slowly sat up, pressing his palm to the floor. His vision cleared, and he turned his head.

The beast lay several meters away.

The mighty Blizzard Pegasus, son of the Blizzard Pegasus Queen, was barely breathing. Divine energy flickered around its body, but the antimatter blast had inflicted wounds its natural regeneration couldn't mend. Entire portions of its icy coat were gone. Its wings trembled. It released low, broken groans that were equal parts pain and stubborn defiance.

Mark approached slowly, his footsteps echoing in the quiet chamber.

"Hey..." he said, a tired sigh escaping him as he stared down at the monster. "You're one tough beast, aren't you?"

The beast raised its head by a tiny margin. Its eyes were half-open, filled with fatigue yet burning with pride. When Mark knelt beside it, it exhaled a soft, struggling breath.

"You lost," Mark said gently. "It was a fair fight."

The divine beast released a faint groan, weak but clear enough.

Ark interpreted immediately.

[Translation: "You won."]

Mark blinked and let out a long, exhausted sigh. "I see... so you accept it."

He stared at the majestic yet wounded creature. In his head, there were two ideas earlier. One, to kill it. Two, to tame it.

Since it accepted defeat, Mark reached for the Taming Skill as he asked, "Will you follow me for the rest of your life?"

[Taming Skill, Activated.]

A golden rope of divine law materialized between his hands, glowing with a brilliance that reflected in its weary eyes. The divine beast didn't resist. Instead, the beast closed its eyes as though acknowledging the new bond... or simply too exhausted to fight anymore.

The rope wrapped around its body and dissolved into shimmering dust.

The system responded immediately.

[ Taming Successful ]

[ Monster Companion Acquired]

Mark let out a tired smile and patted its head.

"From now on... you're with me."

Mark felt the new connection settle into his soul like a soft pulse, steady, vibrant, and unmistakably alive. Its presence was now knitted into him through the soul contract, and Ark confirmed it calmly inside his mind.

[ Monster companion bond established. Blizzard Pegasus is now linked to Master's soul. ]

Mark let out a long exhale and gently stroked its head, still in beast form, feeling the icy mane ripple under his palm. "Thank you," he murmured. "Rest for a bit. let me recover some energy and heal you."

Meanwhile, the holographic screen flared back to life with a cold blue glow: Floor 9 Cleared. Proceed to Floor 10.

Mark didn't get up immediately. He sat cross-legged and waited for his ether to recover to a little over half. Only after Ark notified him did he reach inward and activate the next skill.

[Elixir of Vitality, Activate.]

As he unleashed the skill, a transparent glass flask materialized in his hand, swirling with a thick golden oil that radiated life energy.

Mark didn't waste time; he uncorked it and poured it directly over Frost's wounds. The liquid spread like warm sunlight, filling every injury and knitting divine flesh back together. Within seconds, the Pegasus's breathing steadied, and the divine glow around it thickened.

"Much better," Mark smiled and stroked its mane again.

As if responding to him, the beast's body suddenly glowed.

Mark blinked as the divine light grew, expanding and reshaping, and then, with a soft hum, it vanished.

Standing in front of him was a tall man who looked human.

Chapter 708: The Inheritance Trial (Part-5)

The Blizzard Pegasus turned into a very naked, tall man, with long snow-white hair that fell past his shoulders. His skin was as pale as snow, gleaming faintly with divine energy. His eyes, a striking icy blue, lowered respectfully as he knelt on one knee.

"Frost greets Master," he said in a calm, noble tone.

Mark instinctively looked away and covered half his face with one hand. "Damn it... put on some clothes."

He rummaged through his inventory and tossed a set of simple robes at him. Frost caught them, but instead of wearing them, he stared at the fabric with a strangely sentimental expression.

"Master," he asked, "is this your first present to me?"

Mark stared at him blankly. "No. It's me trying to stop you from flashing me. Wear it. Now."

Frost tilted his head. "Why is nudity unbearable to you?"

"Because I'm human and a man at that," Mark replied with exasperation. "And we don't walk around with our junk out."

Frost blinked slowly, as if learning a new universal truth. "Are you truly human, Master? No human should be immune to absolute freezing unless you have a primordial Ice attribute."

Mark shrugged and turned his back so Frost could dress. "It's a long story. I'll tell you later. For now, we're finishing this tower."

Frost dressed quickly, adjusting the robe somewhat awkwardly, clearly unused to humanoid clothing. Once ready, he followed Mark up the staircase as they stepped into Floor 10. Mark didn't take a rest this time as this time, as he had something that could hold down the fort for him.

The moment the floor lit up, a piercing screech erupted across the chamber, this time. A gigantic Phoenix, wings of blazing gold and crimson, burst into existence.

When the phoenix's golden eyes locked onto the sight of Frost and then Mark, they widened in shock. Its flames spiked. "Human, how do you carry HER bloodline... and also OURS?"

Mark raised an eyebrow. "If you're talking about Blizzard Pegasus Queen and the Immortal Phoenix bloodline, then yeah. My mother carried the former. My father, the latter."

The phoenix's eyes widened even more. "Impossible. Those two races do not mix. Their bloodlines reject each other, "

Mark cut it off sharply. "Let's skip the lecture. You have two choices: submit to me... or die. Choose."

The Phoenix's flames exploded outward in fury, filling the entire chamber with fire so hot it cracked the ground beneath them. "INSOLENT MORTAL! YOU DARE..."

Before the roar even finished, Frost stepped in front of Mark.

His palm lifted, icy mist spiraling around his arm, and a massive dome of frost erupted outward.

The Phoenix's sea of flames smashed into the icy barrier, sending sparks and ice shards exploding across the chamber. Frost gritted his teeth as heat rippled across his shields, steam filling the air.

"Master," Frost said without turning around, voice low and steady, "this phoenix's flames surpass normal divine fire. Be careful."

Mark didn't even flinch as he nodded, "Don't worry. As long as we work together, this will be as easy as a walk in a park."

Frost gave a sideways glance in wonder, but maintained his barrier as the Phoenix roared.

"Blizzard Pegasus... you truly have no shame. To lower your noble head before a lesser creature, before a human, who depends on your own mother's blessing? Have you forgotten your pride?"

Frost's expression turned as cold as the tundras he once ruled. He took a single step forward and said in a steady but sharp voice. "He defeated me, in a fair battle. And even after defeating me at the cost of his life, he still showed kindness to me. He reminded me of our former master. I chose him because a master who pays with his own life to win is worthy of loyalty."

The Phoenix scoffed, flames whipping angrily. But Frost was not finished.

"And do not forget," Frost continued, "you and I both served a human before. Our entire purpose here is to guard this tower and wait for the next master chosen by fate. And look at our fake. The one who carried the same name as our former master has not only reached here but even defeated me..."

The Phoenix screeched again, louder and harsher, flames bursting outward as if offended by Frost's conviction. But before it could launch another flame wave...

Mark's voice echoed softly. "Gravity Dome. One hundred thousand G."

The Phoenix didn't even get time to flare its wings before an invisible force slammed it down like a mountain crushing a bird. Its talons gouged deep trenches in the stone as its wings flattened against the floor, pinned mercilessly.

Mark exhaled calmly and glanced at Frost.

"Go."

Frost launched forward instantly, his body blurring into a streak of white energy. Ice breath blasted from his mouth in a sweeping arc, enveloping the Phoenix's flames and extinguishing them with a violent hiss.

Mark didn't stand still either. He sprinted in, summoning Unnamed into his hand. And used Density manipulation on top of 100,000xG. With a sharp shout, he slammed it down onto the Phoenix's head.

The chamber rumbled at the shockwave generated by the impact.

\*Screeee\*

The Phoenix shrieked, its flames sputtering wildly as its skull was hammered into the ground. Frost followed up with another blast of absolute cold, freezing the Phoenix's wings to the floor.

"Oraaa.... Die..."

Mark swung Unnamed again, this time at its chest, creating a thunderous impact that cracked the ground below.

Working together, human and divine beast moved like a single force.

Meanwhile, the Phoenix's cries turned desperate.

"Y-You... unworthy, "

Frost didn't let it finish and hit it with a spike of divine ice.

The Phoenix's body convulsed, flames extinguished entirely, and then, its form burst into golden feathers, dissolving into embers.

Before Mark could even lower his weapon, the fire cinders swirled back together, re-forming the Phoenix's body. Its eyes glowed fiercely, though weaker this time.

It resurrected.

Mark's expression didn't change. "Again."

The second battle lasted even shorter. Frost pinned it immediately with ice chains while Mark smashed its skull with the weight of a star. Flames sputtered and died as the Phoenix dissolved again.

It resurrected, again.

Flames returned, but only faintly now. The Phoenix's voice trembled with anger and fear.

"You... you dare force me..."

"You're the one who didn't choose surrender," Mark muttered, already lifting Unnamed.

Frost stepped beside him, shedding the last of his previous gentleness. He lowered his head, eyes icy.  
"This is your last life, old friend. If you refuse the new master again... you leave me no choice."

The Phoenix trembled but still refused to bow. Its wings twitched, fire flickering weakly as it tried to rise.

Mark didn't give it a chance.

The man and his Pegasus attacked together, Mark bringing down Unnamed with unstoppable force, Frost freezing the Phoenix from every direction until its body was sealed in a thick glacier of divine ice.

Mark lifted his weapon one last time.

"End."

Unnamed crushed the frozen Phoenix with a single devastating blow.

The Phoenix's last life flickered weakly, its fiery form barely holding shape anymore. Frost had already taken a deep breath, the chilling glow of Absolute Ice building in his throat. One more second, and the entire chamber would have frozen over.

But Mark raised his hand sharply.

"Stop."

Frost halted instantly, swallowing the attack, though the icy radiance still shimmered faintly around his jaw. His eyes darted toward Mark in confusion.

"Master?"

Mark stepped forward, gaze fixed on the trembling Phoenix whose flames had dimmed to embers. Cracks split across her fiery plumage. One wrong move, one more hit, and she would vanish forever.

Mark spoke, tone calm but unmistakably firm. "This is your final chance."

His voice echoed through the chamber like a decree. "Follow me and live for a better purpose... or die here for nothing."

The Phoenix shuddered. Not from fear, no, flames still danced in the remaining corners of her eyes, but from the weight of inevitability pressing down on her. Frost lowered his head slightly, watching quietly.

Mark extended his hand toward her.

"Taming Skill."

A golden rope of light unraveled from his palm, shimmering elegantly before striking the Phoenix. She didn't resist this time. Instead, she let the rope coil around her being, binding spirit to spirit, acknowledging the contract with a weary but defiant cry.

As the rope burst into light and dissolved, the Phoenix's body glowed. Her fiery feathers melted into radiant sparks. A humanoid figure emerged from the blaze, stepping out into the open.

Chapter 709: The Inheritance Trial (Part-6)

This time, a naked woman knelt before him, tall, voluptuous, radiant like living flame. Her long scarlet hair cascaded down her back, her beauty both fierce and divine.

She bowed her head, although with a bit of reluctance in her eyes. "Pyro greets her new Master."

Mark blinked, stunned for a moment before quickly averting his eyes and pulling out clothing from his inventory. "Here. Put these on."

Pyro snorted softly but accepted the clothes, standing with fluid grace as she dressed herself. Her voice carried a proud rasp as she said sharply, lifting her chin. "I only accepted you because I want to live. And I will keep my word. I will lend my strength when you are in danger. But understand this clearly, human..."

Her amber eyes flicked between Mark and Frost.

"I will obey fully only after I acknowledge your power. And right now, you are still unworthy..."

Mark scratched his cheek awkwardly, but inwardly he murmured: Absolute Authority doesn't work perfectly on 14-circle beasts yet... but that's fine. They'll fall in line soon enough.

He didn't need perfect loyalty. Not yet. Strength and practicality were good enough.

Before he could say anything else, the external holographic screen shimmered into existence at the chamber's edge.

[ Floor 10 Cleared ]

[ Congratulations. You have completed the Trial. ]

[ Proceed upstairs to claim the Inheritance. ]

Mark allowed himself a brief smile. "Finally."

He motioned for the two mythical beasts, now in human form, to follow him.

Together, the three ascended the staircase to Floor 11.

But where the previous floors had been loud with monster roars and swirling illusions, the eleventh was silent. Purely silent.

A small chamber spread before them, plain stone walls and soft blue lighting. No glowing screens. No monsters roaring. No illusions or dramatic entrances.

Just a single podium in the center.

Upon it rested a small golden key, its surface engraved with runes so ancient they looked like cracks of primordial light.

Beside it sat a humble wooden chest, no bigger than a shoebox, carved with sigils identical to those adorning the Founder's statue.

Mark took a slow step forward.

Frost and Pyro stayed behind him, both unusually quiet.

Whatever waited inside that chest... it belonged to the Founder himself.

Mark reached out his hand and lifted the key between his fingers, turning it slightly so the soft glow of the chamber flickered across its ancient runes. It didn't feel powerful, nor heavy, nor majestic. If anything, it appeared deceptively ordinary and felt cool against his fingertips.

But the moment he pressed it into the lock of the wooden chest, something clicked inside him. A pulse. A tug. As if something behind that small lid had been waiting for him... for a very long time.

He opened it.

Inside, nestled neatly like it had been placed gently just yesterday, lay a single book. Plain. Bound in faded brown. No aura. No pressure. Nothing.

Mark frowned. He picked it up,

And the holographic screen instantly flashed to life above it.

[ Inheritance Detected ]

[ Inheritance: Mark Spencer ]

[ Accept Inheritance? ]

Mark stared at the words, feeling his entire chest tighten. A strange heat climbed up his spine.

"Yes," he whispered.

The moment he clicked accept, the book dissolved, slowly, like dust in reverse, floating upward in a spiral of tiny luminescent particles. The specks gathered and reshaped, condensing into a silhouette.

A silhouette that grew clearer. And clearer.

Until Mark stopped breathing. "Wha..."

Standing before him... was himself.

The same face.

The same eyes.

The same body he remembered from his previous life.

Frost's voice trembled. "Master..."

Pyro's voice cracked, soft and emotional. "Master..."

The figure smiled faintly, lifting a hand almost as if wanting to touch Mark's cheek, but stopping just before making contact.

"You must be quite surprised," the apparition said, voice warm, steady, far too familiar. "Yes... What you're thinking is correct."

Mark's throat tightened. "But keep that thought to yourself. How this happened... how I ended up here... and why you were reborn, those are answers you'll discover in time."

His tone grew solemn. "Anything I explain now may endanger the timeline."

Mark could only nod, even though his heart felt like it wanted to break out of his chest and question everything.

The apparition turned toward Frost and Pyro.

"Frost. Pyro."

Both beasts, now in human form, fell to their knees, their voices trembling.

"Master...!"

A soft, bittersweet smile curved the holographic Mark's lips.

"I don't have much time. But seeing you both again... I'm glad. Truly."

Frost bowed his head lower, his shoulders shaking. Pyro's flames dimmed, her pride momentarily swallowed by grief.

The apparition continued, voice gentle but firm. "I merely ask you to protect your new master. Keep him alive... That's all I have to ask you."

Something in the air hummed, a vibration that resonated down to the soul.

"This... is goodbye."

The holographic form dissolved into countless lights, each particle sinking into Mark's skin. Knowledge rushed into him like a roaring tidal wave: techniques, designs, memories, blueprints, calculations, and fragments of a life far beyond this world.

His body trembled.

[ Inheritance Acquired ]

[ Supreme Upgrade Crystal (1) ]

[ Supreme Core (1) ]

[ Blood Essence of Tyranthir (1 drop) ]

[ Anti-Matter Cannon (1) ]

Mark sucked in a sharp breath as the notifications continued to appear, one after another.

He lowered his gaze, breath uneven.

So... it really was me.

His past-life self.

His future in the past.

His inheritance was created by... himself.

Eventually, he steadied his breath and opened his inventory screen.

One by one, the items glowed into existence as he selected them/

\*

[SUPREME UPGRADE CRYSTAL ]

Description: Instantly upgrades one Android's cultivation-equivalent power by TWO full realms.

Cannot be used on humans, beasts, or divine constructs.

Note: It can only be used on a Rank-12 Android or a Battle Puppet/Robot above Rank-11. If used on a Rank-13 Puppet, its effect diminishes to 1 rank upgrade.

\*

Mark whistled under his breath. "With this... Alina will jump two realms instantly," he murmured. "That means... straight into the 14-circle peak. But for that, I need to bring it to Rank-12."

He closed and clicked, and held on the next item to check its details.

\*

[SUPREME CORE ]

Description: Instantly breaks the barrier to the 13-circle Realm

Note: This item can only be used at the 12-circle-peak stage.

Mark's eyebrows shot up. "Again... I need to break through to the next stage before using this item."

\*

[BLOOD ESSENCE OF TYRANTHIR ]

Description: Grants Tyranthir Bloodline and its skills.

"Hmm? Tyranthir? Never heard of it."

\*

[ANTIMATTER CANNON ]

Type: Ultra-Long-Range Annihilation Cannon

Range: 30 Light Years

Recharge Time: 365 days of solar absorption

Maximum Power Output: 16.9 (Equivalent to 1 Xennajoule)

Charging Mechanism: Solar conversion array. Converts photons to antimatter. Generates 178 million kg of antimatter per second.

"178 million kg of antimatter.... This is insane." Mark gasped at the last gift. It could indeed be considered an inheritance. How powerful is 16.9 state... Well, Mark didn't know the power, but he was sure that the Jade Emperor was 16-circle... At the same time, Xennajoule of energy release was so strong that it could completely vaporize the entire earth, not simply destroy it. That is how much it carries the potential.

Mark rubbed his temples at last. "My past self really went all out. He created an ultimate weapon in the universe..."

When he finished inspecting all four items, he let out a long, slow breath. Excitement. Fear. Awe. Power. All bubbling in his veins like electricity

Mark stood silently for a moment after closing the inventory, as the reality hit him at once. The weight of everything, inheritance, revelations, responsibilities, pressed into him like a tidal wave.

He was the founder.

Not symbolically.

Not spiritually.

But Literally.

Mark Spencer, somewhere in the future, will go back to the past and build the Ancient Lan Clan. Every tradition, every technique, every elder's lineage... all came from him.

He exhaled slowly, his chest tightening with realization.

He murmured. "No wonder this inheritance tower looked like a hybrid of an RPG and cultivation trial..."

Everything made sense now, except for one thing.

Why did he create Lan Clan but keep it only traditional? Can't he pass down antimatter or adamantine guns or missiles and such to his disciples?

Mark didn't have an answer yet, but one thing became clear to him.

This clan was his responsibility because it was his creation and it was his legacy.

And he almost abandoned it.

He felt a flicker of shame... and then, slowly, the birth of resolve.

"If this is really my clan..." he whispered, "then I'll rebuild it properly."

This place...

This dominion...

These people...

He felt something stir in his chest, something he had denied himself for a long time, a sense of belonging.

Not because of blood.

But because of destiny.

And family... both old and new.

But a dilemma rose immediately in his mind.

Chapter 710: The New Sect Master's orders (Part-1)

Outside the ancient temple, Lan Yujin sat cross-legged on a flat stone platform, his breathing steady and his expression calm as he meditated.

For three days he remained there, waiting for the outcome of the boy's foolish courage. Whether his successor passed or failed, he should have come out. Even if he had died, his corpse would have been thrown out of the portal. But so far, nothing has happened.

Lan Yujin couldn't help but lose patience as more and more time passed, wondering whether Mark had found out the secret of that space or something. Well, it's not much of a secret, but the space inside the portal had denser spiritual energy than even this current world. Hence, he was worried that Mark would just stay there until the breakthrough.

But then, when the faint chime of spiritual resonance echoed through the mountains, Yujin snapped his eyes open. His gaze drifted toward the empty space beside him where the Sect Head Token normally floated. It was gone, vanished without a trace. A deep crease formed between his brows. "So... he actually took time to complete the trials and not train there, huh..." he muttered. "Actually slower than I expected. Did the wisdom trial take longer than normal, or did that brat get lost inside that illusory world? I guess that was the case. After all, even if he was stronger, he was still too young."

His thoughts were interrupted when a ripple of golden light split open the air in front of the temple.

The portal expanded, swirling like a whirlpool of three intertwined colors, white, red, and black, before stabilizing with a low hum. Lan Yujin stood abruptly, his body tightening on instinct.

When the first figure stepped out, Yujin relaxed for a heartbeat upon seeing Mark, but the relief froze instantly the moment two more shapes emerged behind him.

Two towering figures, one radiating icy divinity, the other blazing with fiery majesty, walked out calmly as if they belonged to this world. Their presence made Yujin's breath hitch, and for the first time in hundreds of years, genuine fear rippled through his heart.

These were not mere cultivators. These were beings of the third stage of transcendence, equal in realm to him. His instincts screamed danger while his mind desperately tried to understand why two such monsters were casually walking behind Mark like companions.

Mark then walked toward Yujin with the casual confidence he usually carries and raised a hand and gestured to the two beings at his back. "Great-grandpa, this is Frost," Mark said calmly, "and this is Pyro. You may consider them my subordinates... or my friends... or even my family." His tone was light, but his words struck Yujin's chest like a hammer. Subordinates? Friends? Family? Who were these two? Were they trapped inside that realm or something? He had no answers, but seeing that they followed the boy like loyal guardians, Yujin gulped saliva in nervousness.

Before Yujin could even gather a proper response, Mark lifted his other hand and revealed the glowing medallion resting in his palm. The Sect Head Token shimmered with authority, its radiance unmistakable.

Mark offered a small, almost polite smile that carried a weight far heavier than any arrogance. "I have completed the trials, Great Grandfather," he said. "So, shall we return to the sect? There's a lot to do..."

Lan Yujin stared blankly at the medallion, then at Frost and Pyro, and finally at Mark, this thirteen heavenly-year-old (30) brat who somehow walked out not only alive, but with two divine guardians and the founder's legacy at his back. For the first time, he felt something new toward the boy. Not irritation. Not annoyance. Not suspicion.

But fear... and a faint sense of helplessness. Earlier, he at least had the confidence of influencing people with his incredible cultivation prowess, putting obstacles to Mark's plans. Now, this descendant of his had two of them, like him.

The balance of the sect, the clan, and the entire dominion now fell to his successor's feet that once did to him. But unlike him, this young one is too reckless for his own good. Yujin has no doubt that with Mark's decisions, the Lan Sect... No, the entire dominion of Azure Frost will be doomed.

And now, it has become even more important to kill him.

Back to reality, Lan Yujin swallowed and gave a stiff nod. "Yes... let us return."

Mark stepped forward, Frost and Pyro calmly following him like shadows of ice and flame. Yujin turned toward the sky and took a deep breath before launching himself upward.

The Sect Head had changed.

And the entire sect was about to learn what that meant.

\*

The great hall of the Sect Master was brighter than usual, lit by pale-blue lanterns that shimmered like frozen stars.

Several ceremonial banners had been moved aside to make space, and a new throne was placed at the head of the chamber.

Mark sat there with an expression that was calm yet unreadable, his posture relaxed, but his presence sharp enough to cut the air itself. Hanging at his waist was the Sect Head Token, glowing faintly with authority that none dared question.

On either side of him sat the two grand elders, their faces stiff and their backs straight as if they were prisoners condemned for unknown crimes. And beside them, occupying a newly placed third seat, was Yujin, who now wore the expression of a man who had aged a hundred years in a single afternoon.

But the most terrifying sight in the chamber stood behind Mark's throne.

Frost stood at his right, the air around him crisp and glittering with tiny snow crystals that never touched the ground. Pyro stood at his left, her fiery aura dimmed only out of courtesy, yet hot enough that several elders unconsciously wiped sweat from their brows.

Because they were second-generation divine beasts, they could hide their beastly aura from anyone of the same and below their rank. Only those with higher cultivation than them or the ones with eyes of truth, like special ocular powers, can figure out their identities. But for Lan Yujin and the rest of the sect elders, they were 3rd stage transcendents who were loyal servants to their new sect.

The elders, more than thirty of them, had originally come with pride, some with political intent, some with hidden grudges. But upon seeing those two, almost all of them felt their legs weaken beneath their robes.

Mark let their discomfort stretch for a moment. The silence that filled the hall became a weight on their shoulders, pressing their spines lower and lower.

When he finally spoke, his voice was steady and cold, cutting through the tension like a blade. "First things first," he began, sweeping his gaze across the elders. "Some of you may have heard bits and pieces, but I will make it official now."

The elders straightened, though unease lingered heavily on their faces. After all, this boy, this new sect master, had already shocked the dominion with his declaration of independence. No one knew what kind of announcement he would make next.

"Ten days from now," Mark said, his tone firm, "I will be marrying fellow disciple Lan Xia. It was already announced in our clan."

A current of whispers rippled through the hall. It wasn't some surprising news, but the way it was announced confused them. A wedding is a private affair. Why was this new sect master announcing it to them? They didn't understand. Moreover, only 10 days? Wasn't that too abrupt?

Mark continued without giving them time to fully react. "We have little time," he said, leaning forward slightly, "so I want the entire Elder Council and the sect disciples to cooperate with Lan Clan in preparing for the ceremony. Decorations, security, invitations, guest reception, and necessary arrangements, everything must be handled properly. And quickly."

Several elders swallowed hard. Some were shocked by his boldness, others angered, and a few secretly thrilled by the change in leadership. But despite their mixed feelings, a single thought trembled through all of them: This sect... will never be the same again.

Yet none dared speak, not when those stood behind Mark like loyal shadows, and not when the former sect master himself sat silently at the side, defeated and powerless.

Mark's fingers tapped lightly on the armrest, and his voice dipped lower, steady and commanding. "This is an order from your sect master. You will all assist with the wedding to make sure no one points their fingers at Lan Clan's hospitality."

He didn't shout. He didn't pressure them with spiritual force. But in the oppressive presence of Frost and Pyro, and under the weight of the token glowing at his waist, the authority in his words felt undeniable.

And just like that, the elders bowed, even those who had sworn to oppose him hours ago.

"Understood, Sect Master."

Mark leaned back in the throne, his gaze cold and unreadable.

The Lan Sect had received its first command from the new Sect Head.

But it was just the start.