

Supreme Lord 101

Chapter 101 Artifacts & Fragments

It was late at night when Michael and the citizens of his territory made a memorial for the deceased. Their corpses were burned and tributes were made to cleanse their souls and offer them some last words hoping for a safe journey to the afterlife.

Michael made a long speech to honor the deceased and praise the survivors. He feasted with the survivors and spent hours with them near the big campfire to have one last meal together with the souls of the deceased. Being with the other subjects and warriors didn't make him forget the deceased, but it showed him clearly that his Summons were no different from real human beings.

The Origin Expanse might have resurrected them from death in order to turn them into loyal subjects of their Lords, but that didn't make them any less humane.

Everyone knew that they had already died once and that the Origin Expanse's Will created the Link of Loyalty with their Lord to make sure that they had to obey and couldn't run away from their fate. But with someone like Michael as their Lord that was fine. They would love to grow stronger alongside their Lord and follow him anywhere, even if that meant they would die in the quest.

Their Links of Loyalty grew stronger during the last few hours, telling him that they would join him in battle once again if he said the word.

Once again, Michael realized how important it was for his subjects to trust him. His words were their command. It was a great feeling that caused goosebumps to spread all over his body.

However, it was also terrifying.

A single wrong command was enough to lead his subjects straight to death.

This made Michael think a lot.

The pain and anguish caused by the Lionhearts were still apparent in his heart, but Michael knew that he couldn't have done much to change the outcome of the battle. His battle against the Lionhearts had already been suicidal – stupid even if one could say.

He charged straight into a blazing sea of flames just because he was angry and because he didn't want more subjects to die for his sake. But had that been the best move?

It was only obvious that Michael didn't want to see his subjects die for him, but sacrificing himself for them wasn't an ideal solution either.

Today he was lucky. Only bits of his skin were scorched, and he had received minor burns. It was not serious and had mostly healed after he used a potion and ointment to relieve himself of the ache and heal his skin quickly.

But what if he wasn't that lucky next time?

If he thought about the consequences of his suicidal actions only after he did them, Michael would die sooner or later. That was certainly not something he wanted to happen.

It made him contemplate his actions a lot.

How many people had found out about his territory? Who was the backer of the Lionhearts? Would the backer take revenge on him? If so, when would he attack him?

Too many questions flooded his mind, but Michael couldn't answer any of them. Lilica was not in his territory anymore, and he didn't have enough time to travel to Xiltra and question her.

Michael was not even sure if Lilica would answer his questions, in the first place.

'She is trying to maintain a neutral status with us, but without exposing herself or her team to others. She is a sly Elven woman, who keeps all possibilities open...that's dangerous.'

Once again, Michael understood a crucial point; He and his territory had to grow stronger. The Temple of the Forgotten and the Sapphire Lake Military Academy were two ways to achieve that.

However, before he could enter the Temple of the Forgotten, he required more information about it. To be precise, he needed records about the old languages, raids of other temples to find out what dangers awaited him, and so on.

But before he could acquire information, Michael got up. He walked over to the warehouse where the corpses of the Lionhearts had been stored.

'Their corpses will be worth more if I leave them intact. The research department of the government pays a small fortune for corpses of monster races with innate abilities. But that doesn't mean, I cannot extract everything else, right?' Michael thought to himself.

His hands began to glow golden as streams of golden light emerged from the inside of his palms.

Michael used Extraction on the corpses of the Lionhearts Adventurers. There were a total of 43 corpses, each of them being a Tier-1 Adventurer.

Michael first extracted their War Runes, and the Artifacts bound to their War Runes. The moment the Adventurers attacked him, their fate had been sealed, and so was their War Runes' spatial storage ownership waiting to be claimed by Michael.

In the following minutes, more than 30 Tier-1 Artifacts ended up in Michael's possession. Most of them were Weapon Artifacts, which the Lionhearts had wielded in the battle before.

Each Tier-1 Weapon Artifact was worth a small fortune, however, Michael's facial expression didn't change in the slightest. He didn't bat an eye at the sight of the Artifacts, nor did he feel elated. The gains he made today didn't make up for the pain he and his subjects went through and the losses they sustained.

Other than the Artifacts, Michael procured various potions, sets of clothes, and other objects from the storage of the 43 Adventurers.

Michael stored everything inside his War Rune's storage space. Now that he was a Tier-1 Lord his storage space was much bigger than before. If he squeezed everything inside, the Lionheart corpses would all fit inside. He had that much space!

'To think that the strong Links of Loyalty from more than 400 Summons can result in an enlargement of the War Rune's storage space.' Michael thought, slightly surprised.

He knew that a War Rune's storage space could be expanded with external means such as the number of Links of Loyalty. However, it usually required thousands of Links of Loyalty from Starless Summons to make a significant change. Michael was still quite far away from a thousand subjects, which is why it was so surprising that his War Rune's space was bigger than it should be.

Once he finished extracting the Artifacts and some stored goods from the War Rune's storage space, Michael extracted the SoulStar Fragments of the 43 Adventurers.

Each of the Adventurers had a War Rune, and they had either awoken a complete Soultrait or were gathering enough energy to finish their incomplete Soultraits.

Michael used Extraction on one Lionheart Adventurer after another to see how many SoulStar Fragments every Adventurer would drop. He wanted to find out which Lionheart Adventurer would drop a complete Soultrait Symbol, and how the number of SoulStar Fragments was related to their strength and other factors.

As he extracted the SoulStar Fragments, he restrained the white streams of energy that shot out of his War Rune. The greedy tentacle-like strands of energy desired to devour the SoulStar Fragments. However, Michael didn't allow them to do so.

He wanted to test something.

Ten minutes later, a small pile of SoulStar Fragments and two Soultrait Symbols were spread out in front of him.

The Soultrait Symbols had been extracted immediately. He also knew from which Lionhearts the Soultraits came from, which was also how he knew the power behind the Soultraits.

'Now I can finally figure out how weak Soultraits are at first immediately after extraction!' Michael thought before something else attracted his attention.

The small pile of SoulStar Fragments trembled while the fragments were pulling each other closer. A third Soultrait Symbol was about to form!

"You want to form a Soultrait out of my hard-earned SoulStar Fragments?! Forget it!" Michael declared, unleashing the tentacle-like streams of energy of his War Rune.

The tentacles shot forward and tore the SoulStar Fragments apart, preventing the creation of a third Soultrait Symbol.

Afterward, the tentacles coiled around the SoulStar Fragments, and pulled them inside the War Rune, without leaving a single fragment or Soultrait Symbol aside.

Chapter 102 Quadruple Soultraits

Michael had extracted the two manifested Soultraits from the two strongest Lionhearts. He also found out that a large number of SoulStar Fragments could form a new Soultrait. This had been confirmed by the phenomenon that had happened in front of him.

The white energy tentacle tore apart the newly forming Soultrait Symbol, disintegrating it back into a pile of SoulStar Fragments before it absorbed everything.

This included more than thirty Tier-1 Artifacts, two Soultrait Symbols, and a pile of more than 200 SoulStar Fragments. That was the loot Michael claimed from extracting 43 Lionheart Adventurers. The loot was great.

No, calling his loot great was a gross understatement. It was exceptional!

However, Michael couldn't feel overly excited at this moment.

The brave citizens of his territory had sacrificed themselves to protect his territory and those exceptional gains had come at the cost of their lives.

Michael closed his eyes. He thanked his brave warriors and loyal subjects inwardly before he entered the deepest parts of his consciousness.

The white pillar of his War Rune appeared in front of him, surrounded by four Soultrait Symbols, several Artifact Wisps, and a pile of SoulStar Fragments that was waiting to be used.

The newest Soultrait Symbols were still fusing with the white pillar, which Michael watched calmly.

Under normal circumstances, Michael would have rested or returned to his people to spend some more time with them. However, he was currently driven by the desire to grow stronger. Michael didn't want another situation like today to ever happen again!

The SoulStar Fragments were absorbed but he didn't distribute them yet. Michael waited until his new Soultraits fused with him, and until the information stored in them reached him. He had to know more about his Soultraits to find out whether he should continue using his SoulStar Fragments on both Extraction and the Eagle Eyes, or if he had to find out another method to distribute his SoulStar Fragments properly.

Michael was not sure how much time passed but the first Soultrait Symbol was quickly bound to his War Rune. Information spread through his mind where it was deeply imprinted.

'1-Star Soultrait is called a Lesser Enhancement. It can enhance everything, even the external amplification of Artifacts. That was the Soultrait of the second strongest Lionheart!' Michael thought when he processed bits of the flood of information reached him.

He clearly recalled the white aura mantling the second strongest Lionheart and how much stronger his Artifacts had grown after the white aura had appeared.

Michael didn't hesitate and manifested Tigerfang. He used Lesser Enhancement on Tigerfang, and a thin white aura manifested around the Artifact. The next moment, Michael's Strength, Perception, and

Agility increased a little bit. Simultaneously, the sharpness of Tigerfang's blade and its durability increased as well.

"An overall increment of...10%? That's the power of a 1-Star Soultrait? Strong..."

Michael was impressed. If he upgraded Lesser Enhancement to a 2-Star Soultrait or even a 3-Star Soultrait, how strong would the enhancement effect become? It was quite fascinating.

Just as Michael marveled about the great power of his 3rd Soultrait, the information of the fourth Soultrait flashed through his mind.

'1-Star Soultrait Spirit Whip. Ignores the physical world and directly hits the spirit of its opponents...that's the Soultrait of the Lionheart Leader!'

Michael clearly recalled the tremendous power of the Spirit Whip when it had lashed out at him. The effect was quite powerful, and Michael felt like using it immediately. However, upon activating Spirit Whip, Michael noticed several things.

"The range is short, and it cannot affect the physical world in any way. The energy I can use to condense a Spirit Whip is insignificant but so is the lethality of the Spirit Whip – negligible. Maybe...if I attack someone in close combat and catch them off-guard it will be possible to get the upper hand. But it is much weaker than the Lionheart Leader's Spirit Whip!"

Michael figured that his newest Soultraits were quite interesting. Both Spirit Whip and Lesser Enhancement were rather useful if used at the right time. But since they were 1-Star Soultraits there was a lot to improve.

'Now...how should I distribute my SoulStar Fragments?' Michael wondered.

He was not sure how long it would take before he would accumulate more than 200 SoulStar Fragments again. It was only obvious, but the Untamed Jungle was not exactly a place known for Adventurers and Lords to gather.

'219 SoulStar Fragments and I have four Soultraits. 3-Star Extraction, 2.2-Star Eagle Eyes, 1-Star Lesser Enhancement, and 1-Star Spirit Whip...'

At first, Michael felt like focusing on Eagle Eyes, possibly upgrading Eagle Eyes to 4-Star with all of his SoulStar Fragments. That way, he would be able to perform better in the aptitude assessment. But he quickly chose against doing this. It was not as if he would have any issues during the aptitude assessment with his current strength.

It would be a walk in the park to get admitted to the Sapphirelake Military Academy. That was something Michael was certain about.

He changed his approach and chose to do a little experiment.

'How many SoulStar Fragments do you need to upgrade to 4-Star?' He asked himself in mind before he put one SoulStar Fragment after another into the Symbol of Extraction.

Extraction was already a 3-Star Soultrait, so he could find out how many SoulStar Fragments he required to upgrade a 3-Star Soultrait by a full rank.

Less than five minutes later, Michael found the answer.

"200 SoulStar Fragments...That's a lot more than I expected..." He murmured, not sure if he was happy or not.

He had only 19 SoulStar Fragments left, and three Soultraits that had yet to be upgraded. However, the most important Soultrait of his had been upgraded, so he was not dissatisfied.

His entire growth was based on Extraction. If he could increase his gains when looting monsters, Adventurers, and Lords by upgrading Extraction to a higher star rating, why wouldn't he do it? It was thanks to Extraction that he could acquire new Soultraits, in the first place, and it was also because of Extraction that he could upgrade them.

Enhancing Extraction to a new star rating meant that he would gain more. It wasn't a wasteful investment at all!

With that in mind, Michael spent 16 SoulStar Fragments to advance Eagle Eye to a 3-Star Soultrait. Combined with the SoulStar Fragments of the Black Bear that had been spent on Eagle Eyes, Michael spent a total of 19 SoulStar Fragments to enhance the 2-Star Eagle Eyes to a 3-Star Soultrait.

That number was within his expectations.

'Advancing Eagle Eyes from 2-Star to 3-Star requires 19 SoulStar Fragments. On the other hand, Extraction requires 200 SoulStar Fragments from 3-Star to 4-Star. In that case...how much does it cost to enhance a 1-Star Soultrait?'

Michael was curious, and he was certain that he couldn't waste his SoulStar Fragments since both Lesser Enhancement and Spirit Whip were pretty powerful.

Thus, he simply invested the remaining three SoulStar Fragments to Lesser Enhancement, upgrading the 1-Star Soultrait at once.

After Lesser Enhancement was upgraded to a 2-Star Soultrait, it enhanced Tigerfang overall by 20%. This kind of increase was enough to increase Michael's combat prowess by a large margin.

He began to imagine using Lesser Enhancement on several Artifacts at the same time and his mind made up several plans and combat strategies on how to utilize Lesser Enhancement in the best possible ways.

"This is interesting!"

Chapter 103 Forgetful Michael

Upgrading a Soultrait from 1-Star to 2-Star required 3-4 SoulStar Fragments. Enhancing a Soultrait from 2-Star to 3-Star, on the other hand, required roughly 20 SoulStar Fragments. This increment was already quite high, but it seemed like upgrading Soultraits would become increasingly difficult the higher the Star rating.

After all, enhancing Extraction from 3-Star to 4-Star required 200 SoulStar Fragments, ten times the amount Eagle Eyes required to upgrade from 2-Star to 3-Star!

He didn't want to know how much enhancing Extraction to 5-Star cost, but he had a premonition. Michael didn't like this premonition, but there was not much he could do about it.

He could only accept it.

"I wonder if I can acquire SoulStar Fragments in the Temple of the Forgotten..." Michael wondered at this moment.

He figured that there were various ways to procure SoulStar Fragments, and imagined the Temple of the Forgotten to be one way.

His desire for strength had turned even fiercer after today's event, but he also knew that the Temple of the Forgotten was a place he shouldn't visit just yet.

He was not well versed with the language used in the Temple of the Forgotten, and there were only a few ways to find out more about the old tongue used before the third epoch; using the network system of other races.

'I wonder if the network system of the Sapphirelake Military Academy is connected to the Barbarians and the Warlock Centaurs...'

Danny told him that the language used in the Third Epoch was the oldest language of the Origin Expanse that had been studied by mankind. Thus, he would have to seek help from the other – older – races to study the languages used before the Third Epoch.

Both the Barbarians and Warlock Centaurs had spent several millennia in the Origin Expanse. Maybe, some of them were alive when the old tongues had been commonly used in the Origin Expanse!

With that understanding in mind, Michael sincerely hoped that the Saphirelake Network was better than the Bartholomew Network, or he would have to soon pay a visit to the Barbarians and Warlock Centaurs.

Fortunately, the Saphirelake Military Academy was in the same Stellar System, so there was hardly any issue.

Now that he recalled that the Saphirelake Military Academy still existed, Michael felt that he was forgetting something.

"Wait..."

His eyes widened and he rushed out of the warehouse after stuffing all Lionheart corpses into his War Rune's spatial space.

He found Tiara near the huge campfire they had made to honor the deceased and dashed towards her.

"How long has it been since I started my advancement to Tier-1?" Michael asked immediately.

Tiara, who hadn't expected such a question, looked at him with a slightly stupefied gaze.

"Master...it has been almost three days since you returned to your territory to advance. Did something happen?" Tiara asked worriedly.

Michael waved his hand in denial while calculations ran through his head.

'I had two days left when I returned to the Origin Expanse. Almost three days inside the Origin Expanse meant that roughly 36 hours passed outside...I still have some time before the aptitude assessment starts...lucky me!'

Michael's heart was beating rapidly and he sighed in relief. However, it was just a moment later when his heart skipped a beat. He recalled something else he had forgotten.

'Alice wanted to meet me the day before the aptitude assessment to give me the Tier-1 Artifacts!!'

"Shit!" He cursed while turning back to Tiara.

"I have to leave. I will be back in a day or two. Don't worry about me. If something happens in the Origin Expanse, take care of it. You're in charge!" Michael said hurriedly, before he hastily added, "If an adventurer team like the Lionhearts appear again, either take them by surprise or flee if their combat prowess is too high for us to handle. It doesn't matter what happens to the territory as long as you guys survive!"

After Michael gave her the instructions, he manifested the Runic Gate. He made a last prayer to the deceased and disappeared in the next moment.

It was hard to pinpoint how much time had passed in the outside world when you spent too long inside the Origin Expanse. The time spent in the Origin Expanse seemed magical and it passed much faster than one may think.

One day outside the Origin Expanse was equivalent to two full days inside, but it didn't feel like that, at all.

In fact, Michael did not even feel like leaving his territory and the Origin Expanse at times. He knew that he could spend several weeks in the Origin Expanse without feeling bored, while the same may not be the case outside the Origin Expanse.

Most people wouldn't even bother to leave the Origin Expanse for several months because there were so many things one could do inside the mythical realm of the Origin Expanse.

It was magical and far more entertaining than the outside world. At least, that was what many thought.

However, there were also adventures and mythical places outside the Origin Expanse. It was just that they were harder to come by than the places in the Origin Expanse.

Upon emerging outside the Origin Expanse, Michael felt a little weird. His Sun Soldier's Breathing mastery had increased considerably in the past few days, and Michael had learned to take in traces of the Origin Expanse's energy by breathing. Thus, it was a little bit weird now that the air around him was void of energy.

The sensation of missing the Origin Expanse's dormant energy was something most Lords and Adventurers were aware of. It was also the reason why most people would return to the Origin Expanse more often than they needed to.

They were addicted to the Origin Expanse's energy and couldn't live without it anymore after they spent years in the Origin Expanse. They were drugged and would never be able to survive without their beloved drug. After all, the drug was natural, highly potent, allowed them to grow stronger, and it invigorated their mind and bodies.

Michael felt the lack of origin energy for the first time, and it was already bothering him. However, he could still endure the sensation of loss.

He was already late, so he hurriedly opened the messenger on his crystal watch and typed a message to Alice Zenovia.

[Michael: I'm on my way.]

'I hope you're not too angry. I was almost burned to a crisp today...have some mercy.' He mumbled in his mind while staring at the messenger.

While continuing to stare at his crystal watch, he rushed to the bathroom, washed up and changed into a new set of clothes. Once he was done with everything, he booked a shuttle and rushed downstairs as it reached the entrance of his building.

Just as he jumped into the shuttle, a notification reached him.

Alice sent him a message.

[Alice Zenovia(fierce beauty): You bastard! Why am I always the one waiting for you!?!? Do you think I'm your personal maid, or what?!?']

Michael's expression contorted when he saw the message, but he ended up smiling faintly at last.

'This will be fun.'

It was time to meet up with Alice once again.

Chapter 104 Payment

"Why...are you bald? Are you trying to be a trendsetter, or what?"

Alice's surprised voice echoed through the private dining room. She was utterly dumbfounded as she stared at Michael, who didn't have a single strand of hair on his head.

Even his eyebrows were missing.

What the hell was Michael trying to do?

They were supposed to meet up for dinner a few hours ago to make sure that Michael had enough time to bind the new Artifacts to his War Rune and adapt to the external enhancements he would receive from the Artifacts. However, Michael didn't show up.

He messaged her well after midnight and told her that he was on his way. Alice had been about to workout and finish the last preparations for the aptitude assessment when she received his message.

It was already way too late, and she was angry because she had been waiting for Michael for two whole hours.

Nobody was daring or stupid enough to let her wait for half an hour, forget about two whole hours, yet Michael acted nonchalantly.

Alice didn't want to meet up with him anymore, but she had to repay her brother's debt, and she wanted to thrash him a little bit because he made her wait for two hours.

But when she saw Michael, her anger dissipated. Her anger was replaced by confusion and numerous doubts.

Michael tilted his head upon hearing Alice's question.

'Bald? Who? I am?'

Confused, he ran a hand over his head only to find out that there was nothing. He... was bald!

His eyes widened in surprise, and he summoned Tigerfang to use the blade's reflection to take a look at himself.

"Oh fuck...even my eyebrows burned..." Michael cursed quietly as he kept staring at his reflection.

He could also see patches of his charred skin, but that didn't really bother him. These shallow burns didn't have any impact on him. However, his hair was a whole different matter.

It would take months until his hair would have grown enough for him to look the same as before. Maybe it would take even longer!

Seeing how Michael acted after realizing that all of his hair was burned, Alice was even more confused.

Only now did she pay attention to the burns all over his arms, neck, and head. Her curiosity was drawn to his Tier-1 War Rune and the pressure Michael radiated without realizing.

Compared to the last time they met only three weeks had passed...inside the Origin Expanse. Spending three weeks in the Origin Expanse was enough for Michael to reach the Late stage of Tier-0, advance to Peak Tier-0, and break the barrier separating him from Tier-1. This kind of speed was not something one could attain easily.

It either meant, Michael spent three weeks hunting powerful monsters, or that he had dozens of powerful subjects that were as strong as Michael. However, the latter was not something that should be possible as a new Lord.

But that was exactly what confused Alice. Michael's presence as a Lord was overbearing. It was not something an ordinary Tier-1 Lord could attain easily. It meant that Michael was either in possession of thousands of subjects or that he had a few hundred subjects with an extraordinary firm Link of Loyalty.

But that didn't make any sense either. Michael was a new Lord. Did he purchase thousands of Ordinary Summoning Scrolls to increase the number of his subjects quickly? Alice could not figure out how Michael had achieved so much in such a short span.

Meanwhile, Michael was still shocked about the loss of his hair, but he had to get back to his senses to finish business first. It was already well past midnight, and the aptitude assessment would start early in the morning on the next day.

He had only a few hours left to bind the new Artifacts and adapt to the enhancements they would provide.

"You don't have to worry about me. I was just swimming in a sea of flames for a while," Michael explained nonchalantly.

He didn't want to go further into detail, but it was quite obvious that Alice didn't believe his words completely. Of course, that didn't really matter to Michael. She could believe whatever she wanted to.

"..."

"Okay..." Alice just said.

She could tell from Michael's eyes that he was not lying, but it was also quite obvious that he wouldn't tell her more. Thus, to bury her curiosity, Alice went straight to business.

She retrieved a bunch of Tier-1 Artifacts from her War Rune and spread them out on the dining table.

At the sight of the artifacts, Michael's eyes began to glimmer brightly.

"I couldn't find a suitable Spear or a Longsword Artifact, but I found something better. At least, I'd like to say that it's better than the Weapon Artifact you asked for. Unfortunately, your demands were quite hard to fulfill since you wanted 3-Star Artifacts of the best quality – which makes sense, of course," Alice informed.

She didn't explain the difficulties she had to face in procuring the most suitable set of Tier-1 Artifacts, especially with the requirements of external enhancements and enchantments Michael requested beforehand.

Alice didn't even have that much time to search for the Artifacts Michael requested. She had been busy preparing the aptitude assessment, tending to family businesses, and both lecturing and training her brother. Finally, there was also Kaleb's soon-to-be wife.

Alice really didn't understand what her parents saw in the Blade family, or what her younger brother could see in Jasmine Blade, but they loved them. It was something she really couldn't understand.

Shaking her head, she pointed at the first set of Artifacts.

"This set of leather armor includes the chestplate, leg guards, and boots. It's called Onyx Dragon Armor and is a 3-Star Tier-1 Artifact Set with protection enchantment. The combined efforts of a Master Enchanter and a Grandmaster Tailor were required to create it.

They worked hard to create an Artifact Set which has stronger effects if used together. The protection enchantments' full power can protect you from most physical attacks!"

The black leather armor set looked great and indomitable. It was not created from the hide of an Onyx Dragon but looked quite similar.

"It's made of an Onyx Serpentine's scales, which is said to be the pre-evolution of an Onyx Flood Dragon. Of course, this hasn't been confirmed, so it's just a legend. Either way, the Armor Set provides an overall enhancement with great focus on Agility," Alice said before Michael could ask about the name.

Afterward, she diverted her focus to the other Artifacts. She pointed at the weapon that looked quite similar to a spear.

"The Seron Voulge is a Natural 3-Star Tier-1 Weapon Artifact. It has a very high destructive force, which is why I chose this weapon for you instead of the other spears and longswords I found. You might not have asked for this, but I can promise you that the Seron Voulge is stronger than 99% of Natural 3-Star Tier-1 Weapon Artifacts you can find. It enhances your Agility and Perception drastically, while also providing a decent enhancement in Strength," Alice shared some key insights about the artifact.

She knew that Michael didn't ask for a Voulge but she felt that it would suit Michael quite well, "If you don't like it, that's fine as well. I can bring you another Weapon later."

Michael looked at the Seron Voulge with squinted eyes. The Seron Voulge consisted of a long staff with a slightly curved blade attached to the upper end. The blade was wide and resembled a short saber with its curve and single cutting edge.

The Voulge's blade was 70 centimeters long and was made of sturdy, black metal. It was obviously a weapon designed for powerful strikes, capable of inflicting significant damage to medium to large-sized opponents.

Overall, it was a formidable weapon, combining the features of a blade and a staff. Its wide, curved design enhanced its cutting ability, turning it into an effective tool for close-quarters and mid-range combat.

"Another reason why I picked the Seron Voulge for you is because of the Bow I chose. I wasn't able to find a 3-Star Tier-1 Return Arrow that suits your taste. The bunch I found wouldn't satisfy you. But don't frown just yet. I found a rare 3-Star Tier-1 Siltang Bow. It has two enchantments and a high natural pulling force!" Alice introduced the last Artifact she brought.

"The two enchantments render the Return Arrows useless, so don't worry. The first enchantment is called [Energy Storage]. You can store your energy in the frame of the Siltang Bow. This makes it sturdier, but that's not the main point. The point of the first enchantment is that it allows you to use the second enchantment much easier called [Arrow Creation]. You can condense arrows out of origin energy that way. The more energy you use the stronger the arrow will be!"

Michael nodded his head. The Siltang Bow looked quite exquisite. It was made out of twisted silver sparkling wood. Its appearance was already enough to make it clear that it was expensive.

Alice noticed his expression and smiled. She added a few words to show clearly how valuable the Siltang Bow truly was.

"The Siltang Bow was created by a Grandmaster who knows his work like the back of his hand. It is more expensive than the price of an ordinary 3-Star Tier-1 Bow and a 3-Star Tier-1 Return arrow combined!"

"Wow." Michael exclaimed quietly.

He looked at the batch of the Artifact Set, the Seron Voulge, and the Siltang Bow with gleaming eyes.

Michael was certain that Alice had worked hard enough to repay her brother's debt. The Artifacts were not something he could have found easily.

Alice had done a great job helping him!

"Thank you!"

Chapter 105 Exceptional Enhancement

"I cannot give you Tigerfang just yet," Michael said as he cut his connection to the remains of the Boots of Taran, the Hardwood Bow, and the Return Arrow.

Several streams of energy shot out of the War Rune. They coiled around the Onyx Dragon Armor Set and the Siltang Bow, binding it.

Meanwhile, Seron Voulge was stored in the storage space of his War Rune. He had never wielded such a weapon before, and he wouldn't use it for the aptitude assessment either way. It was too risky to fool around with a new weapon at such an important event.

He still had Tigerfang, so he didn't bind Seron Voulge to his War Rune just yet.

"That makes sense. I will leave then. There is still some work left to do," Alice said.

Her hands were itching to grab Tigerfang but she decided to wait. It was not as if she pressed on time, and she knew that Michael wouldn't be foolish enough to use a new weapon for the aptitude assessment. He was the most familiar with Tigerfang and would change his weapon only after the aptitude assessment was over.

With nothing left to do in the dining room, Alice didn't want to linger around needlessly. Michael had a lot to do in the next few hours now that he obtained new Artifacts, and her work was not done either.

"My brother's debt will be considered settled with the Artifacts I procured. I think you understand how valuable these Artifacts are," Alice said sternly before a faint smile formed on her lips. She pointed at the dining table, "It's my treat. Eat your fill."

Saying so, she left without another backward glance. The sliding door closed behind her, leaving Michael and the food alone.

Michael stared at the sliding door for a second or two. He smiled lightly and turned his head back to the Onyx Dragon Armor and the Siltang Bow. Next, he slowly bound the Artifacts to his War Rune.

It took just enough time to focus on the dining table and the delicacies they'd served.

There were already more than five dishes, but their portions were small and wouldn't fill him. Thus, being the glutton he was, Michael ordered more dishes while savoring the food that had already been served.

He ate to his heart's content without care and finished binding the new Artifacts to his War Rune. Once he was done eating, his skin glowed brightly, and a vibrant smile appeared on his face.

Michael had completely forgotten about the loss of his hair.

"Alice...you're much nicer than I thought. You look fierce on the outside but you're beautiful on the inside!" Michael murmured to himself, thanking Alice Zenovia for treating him with a sumptuous late-night dinner.

Everyone who treated him to a meal had to be a nice and sincere person. That was something Michael was certain about.

"Now...what am I going to do with you guys?" He mumbled, staring at the Hardwood Bow and the Return Arrow.

The Boots of Taran were completely destroyed. Nobody would want to buy them given their battered condition. Unfortunately, even the Hardwood Bow was cracked, and the Return Arrow had also seen better days.

"I have no use for them anymore. I should just sell them," Michael concluded.

Tiara would just break the Bow and Return Arrow, but if he sold them, a high-ranked artisan could repair these damaged goods. That way, the two Artifacts wouldn't be discarded for good.

Since he was already in the Central Trading Hall, Michael turned to the House of Witchery. He had lots of goods to sell, including the Hardwood Bow and the Return Arrow.

On his way to the House of Witchery, Michael tried to sense the changes inside his body. The Onyx Dragon Armor Set and the Siltang Bow had been bound to his War Rune, and their enhancement was slowly spreading through his body.

The overall increase provided by his new Artifacts was more than 30%. Meanwhile, His Agility was enhanced by more than 60%, similar to his Perception which strengthened his senses considerably.

Since the Onyx Dragon Armor Set consisted of three 3-Star Tier-1 Artifacts, Michael expected his strength to increase considerably. However, the external enhancement he received surpassed his expectations by large. He was grateful that he hadn't been greedy enough to request more Tier-1 Artifacts from Alice because his body wouldn't be able to handle more.

He was already at his limit as the Lowest-grade Tier-1 Lord!

When he entered the House of Witchery, Michael was greeted like a normal guest. Nobody paid him much attention at first. Only two female staff members looked at him before they started gossiping.

Michael ignored their gossip and approached the Witchery Bazaar.

"I'm sorry, but the Witchery Bazaar is not open at night," The staff member filling the empty shelves near the Witchery Bazaar said in a neutral tone.

Michael smiled in response and retrieved the Golden Bartholomew Membership Card.

"I thought you could use the Witchery Bazaar all day with the Golden Bartholomew Membership Card," Michael replied in a voice loud enough for the young man to hear.

He turned around just to see the golden card in Michael's hand.

The young man then looked at Michael and frowned.

"Mr. Michael Feng?!" He exclaimed, and his eyes shot wide open.

The shock in the young man's eyes was not something that could be faked easily. However, Michael could only nod his head.

'I was just as shocked as you were when I realized that all my hair was burned.'

"That's my name, yes. So, can I use the Witchery Bazaar right now, or is it not allowed?" Michael inquired again, to which the young man responded by aggressively nodding his head.

"Of course Of course. Let's go to the appraisal room immediately!" He said, putting his work aside to take care of Michael's needs.

Half an hour later, Michael's business was completed. They returned from the appraisal room and signed the form to validate the deal and the transaction.

Michael earned a total of 35,887,000\$ by selling 43 Tier-1 Lionheart corpses, 31 Tier-1 Artifacts, and other goods which he had extracted from the Lionhearts' War Runes, the Hardwood Bow, and the Return Arrow.

The Tier-1 Artifacts were sold for an average of one million dollars. Their contribution in today's earnings was the highest, but that was expected. The Tier-1 Artifacts might not have been exceptional but most of them had been Weapon Artifacts with decent enhancements and enchantments. They were still valuable.

After he earned a fortune, Michael wanted to spend an hour or two to purchase more goods, but he noticed that his body took more time adapting to the enhancements of his newly bound Artifacts than he thought.

In fact, his mind had yet to fully process and come to terms with the fact that he had successfully advanced to Tier-1. He had yet to adapt to his advancement but had still gone ahead to bind several 3-Star Tier-1 Artifacts to his War Rune. Of course, his body couldn't adjust to the changes that quickly.

It hadn't even been a full day since he advanced to Tier-1, after all!

Thus, Michael postponed his shopping spree. Instead of shopping, Michael walked over to the Central Training Hall's Training Centre.

He bought a ticket to use the Training Centre once and started to train like a maniac in order to accelerate the adjustment process of his newly acquired strength and the enhancements of his new Artifacts.

A few hours later, the morning sun rose above the horizon.

Michael was sweating buckets and he was a little tired, but a bright smile covered his face.

He was ready for the aptitude assessment!

Chapter 106 Aptitude Assessment

The aptitude assessment of the Golden Sun province was held in the Golden Sun College's Gym near the Central Trading Hall.

It was a huge hall with several floors that was usually used by the students of the Golden Sun College. Today, the Gym was reserved for the applicants of the Sapphirelake Military Academy.

Applicants from all over the Golden Sun province applied to the Sapphirelake Military Academy, but there were only a few thousand spots.

The Golden Sun province already had close to 100,000 applicants. The number was in the millions in Elyra, and even higher all over the solar system.

Of course, most people applied to multiple Academies and Universities simultaneously, but the number of applicants for the Sapphirelake Military Academy was on par if not higher than the number of people applying to join the Big Five Universities and the Great Three Academies.

Michael was probably the only one who applied just to the Sapphirelake Military Academy. In fact, he didn't even apply. Alice did that for him.

At first, he was against Alice's actions and felt like she intervened too much in his business, but he felt grateful to her now. The Sapphirelake Military Academy would give him the necessary opportunities to procure more information about the old languages before the Third Epoch.

By the time Michael arrived in front of the Golden Sun College's Gym, he was a little late. After working out for several hours in the Training Centre, Michael had to eat a little bit more. He consumed too much nutrition and carbs doing all those high-intensity workouts.

It was a bad omen to participate in an important exam with an empty stomach. That was what his brother told him all the time.

Thus, he ended up a little late, staring blankly at five extraordinarily long queues. Powerful Adventurers and Lords carefully guarded each queue.

They were bodyguards, who had been hired to protect the applicants from external danger, and from each other. Simultaneously, they had to make sure that nobody would skip the line and that everything went smoothly.

Michael was sure that it was not necessary to have a dozen powerful Adventurers standing guard in each queue, but he was quickly proven wrong.

Before the applicants were allowed to enter the Golden Sun College's Gym, they had to meet the requirements first.

The applicant's ID would be scanned to look at their records, their final score would be noted, and the age of their bones would be tested and compared to the energy level of their War Runes.

If there were too many duplicate records, the final score was too low, or the student possessed too little energy for his, or her age, the applicant wouldn't be allowed inside the Golden Sun College's Gym. It was harsh, but so was reality.

Michael didn't think that students would apply to the Sapphirelake Military Academy if they knew that they were trash. However, the truth was the complete opposite.

A tenth of applicants barely met the requirements to enter the Golden Sun College's Gym, and those who failed to enter the Gym would either scream loudly, voice out their complaints loud enough for everyone to hear, or go wild like bloodthirsty maniacs.

Only a few students left silently with their heads hanging low, most had to be carried away by the bodyguards.

That was shocking for Michael. He didn't think that it would be this difficult to enter the Gym where the aptitude assessment would start for real.

'I should think of the door to the gym as the first hurdle. The aptitude assessment started the moment I became an applicant to the Sapphirelake Military Academy!' Michael mused inwardly as he queued up.

Michael thought that it would take a while before the hundreds of people in front of him were either thrown out, or given permission to enter the Gym, but it was not even lunchtime when it was finally his turn.

It looked like he was one of the last applicants to appear. Nobody had queued up behind him.

"Scan your ID over here and stretch your right arm out." A neutral voice spoke to him.

The woman standing in front of him looked exhausted. Her eyes screamed that she needed a few more holidays and that it was time to go home.

Michael retrieved his Lord ID and stretched out his right hand. The Lord ID was scanned, and both his records and final exam score were shown and thoroughly looked through by the artificial intelligence that was used during the aptitude assessment.

A few seconds later, Michael was allowed to retrieve his Lord ID once again, and three notifications popped up in front of the tired woman.

[Final Exam Score: 584 Points – Excellent]

[Criminal Records: None]

[Humanity Danger Level: 0]

"Looks fine to me," She said nonchalantly. Her hand reached out to Michael's stretched-out arm in the next second.

"Don't resist the warmth. I am using my Soultrait to scan your energy level and the age of your bones."

As her words reached his ears, Michael felt a sudden warmth spread through his arm. It was refreshing and soothing.

"Layla, note down that the applicant turned 18 this month according to his bone age. Both the bone age and the time of his War Rune's manifestation match with the date of birth on his Lord ID." The woman said before she stopped.

One may not think that it was an issue, but it was crucial that the bone age, the ID's date of birth, and the time of the War Rune's manifestation overlapped. The reason all this data had to overlap was that many big families tried to fool Big Universities and Academies using means to fake IDs, stagnate their descendant's bone aging, and so on.

Why? Not every descendant of the strongest families was exceptional. That was simply not possible, not even with the influx of countless resources, the best instructors, and various other methods to strengthen the youngest generation.

However, the strongest families and most influential clans had to ensure their reputations wouldn't be harmed in any way. Their descendants had to be known as prodigies rather than bottom rankers and pushovers. That is why they used every possible means to provide their talentless descendants more time to study and train longer than others before they would have to compete against Awakened, who manifested their War Rune much later.

This worked for a while until a few families' debauchery had been exposed.

In response to the trickery used in the aptitude assessments, the tests were changed, and made more stringent, making it near-impossible to fool the system.

But the exhausted woman had a different reason why she halted in her tracks. She was not worried that Michael was trying to fool the system. The woman closed her eyes, and Michael's hand was getting warmer as she completed the scan.

Simultaneously, the AI's voice rang out.

[Noted. Bone Age and date of birth match. The applicant was born 18 years and 17 days ago. Energy Level Data is still missing!]

"Lowest Tier-1...you advanced pretty fast, not bad. You're still a Lord as well. Good!" The exhausted woman said after a while.

She let go of his arm and gave him a thumbs up.

Afterward, the woman noted down his energy level on the assessment form with his name.

"You can go inside. Good luck."

Michael smiled at the exhausted woman and thanked her profusely. Then he walked inside the Golden Sun College's Gym.

He overcame the first hurdle without any qualms. It hadn't been that difficult, but that was only because he worked hard enough in the last few years.

His final exam score was high because of his hard work, and he didn't have any criminal records because he didn't beat the shit out of his former classmates. Michael endured their bullying without retaliation for years. Finally, he received acknowledgment for that – even if it was just from artificial intelligence.

The past did not matter right now. What was important was that he had made it and that he didn't allow his intrusive thoughts of the past to subdue his willpower. It may not be important to others, but Michael felt proud.

Inside the Golden Sun College's Gym, Michael was led to the next station. His blood sample was taken, and a few staff members approached him with a few machines.

"Please don't worry, Sir. We will attach something to your body to test the soul power of your Soultrait. Please don't resist and utilize your Soultrait's full power!"

'Hmm?!'

Chapter 107 Soul Power

Testing the power of a Soultrait was possible thanks to the technique mankind developed over the course of hundreds of years.

It was rarely tested because the results had never been accurate in the past. That only changed with the technological advancement of the past decade.

A testing device to perceive the Soul Power exuded by Soultraits had been created.

However, the testing device was not perfect. It couldn't determine the Soultrait's star rating, or how many Links of Loyalty enhanced the Lord's Soul Power.

Several machines were attached to Michael in order to test the Soul Power he could unleash upon releasing the strongest form of his Soultrait.

But Michael didn't move an inch. He was as stiff as a board.

Michael didn't want his four Soultraits to be discovered. In fact, he would rather reveal only one Soultrait while keeping the others a secret. That was why the appearance of the Soul Power testing device scared him.

"Sir, you have to use your Soultrait, otherwise, we cannot test your Soul Power," One of the female staff members said. She looked at him in annoyance.

Michael's heart skipped a beat when he heard what she said. 'They cannot test my Soul Power if I don't activate my Soultrait? Oh my gosh...that's great!'

Color returned to his pale cheeks, and he smiled brightly at the annoyed female staff.

"I have two Soultraits. A 3-Star Soultrait and a 2-Star Soultrait. Please take that into consideration when you test my Soul Power," Michael said energetically before he unleashed his Eagle Eyes and Lesser Enhancement Soultraits to the extreme.

The testing devices attached to his body began to gleam faintly and the monitor attached to the testing devices displayed a few numbers.

"Two Sources of Soul Power have been detected. The weaker source has 69 Units of Soul Power and the stronger has 169 Units of Soul Power." The staff member working on the monitor revealed with slight astonishment.

He looked over to Michael and squinted his eyes. Afterward, he opened the assessment form with Michael's name on it and noted down the data.

"That... Is the device broken?" The annoyed woman asked. She lifted her right eyebrow and took a second glance at Michael.

"Double Trait, a 3-Star Soultrait with 169 Soul Power Units, and a 2-Star Soultrait with 69 Soul Power Units, and he is an 18-year-old Tier-1 Lord...that's amazing!!" The staff member working on the monitor exclaimed.

Amazed by this revelation, the young man quickly opened Michael's assessment form and didn't think twice before he scanned Michael's data thoroughly.

"Do you know what that means?!" The young man asked loudly, turning over to Michael, who could only stare back at him with a blank expression.

He didn't know much about Soul Power. The only thing Michael had learned about Soul Power was that Soul Power is the Unit used to determine the strength of a Soultrait.

Soultraits were not only ranked according to their star rating but their Soul Power as well. Soultraits could be nourished by the refinement degree of the War Rune they're bound to. The higher the Tier and refinement degree of the War Rune, the stronger the Soultrait. Simultaneously, the number of Links of Loyalty, and their firmness played a similarly crucial role.

Both the Links of Loyalty and the War Rune could nourish the Soul Power of Soultraits, enhancing their power gradually.

That was also why the Soultraits of Lords grew stronger than the Soultraits of Adventurers. Lords had countless Links of Loyalty to nourish their Soultrait's Soul Power, while Adventurers could only strengthen their Soul Power by enhancing their War Rune.

But that was already the extent of knowledge Michael had about Soul Power. It was not a topic that was taught in high school. Soul Power was only relevant to Lords and Adventurers, and not everyone in high school would manifest a War Rune. Even then, Soul Power was a more advanced subject that couldn't be studied in depth without learning the basics.

"After testing hundreds of thousands of Soultraits it was found that the strongest 2-Star Soultrait cannot have more than 50 Soul Power Units. Even if your 2-Star Soultrait is one of the strongest 2-Star Soultraits we've tested, it must have been nourished quite a lot by your Links of Loyalty and War Rune." The male staff member exclaimed.

"Can you tell me how you were able to consistently nourish your Soultrait? It must have been really difficult to nourish your 2-Star Soultrait!" He added with great curiosity.

The young man was overly excited, which Michael couldn't really understand.

Everything he did was expose Eagle Eyes and Lesser Enhancement. Was there an issue?

Michael didn't think so, but he was a little bit nervous seeing how excited the staff member was.

The young man talked only about his 2-Star Soultrait, but what about his 3-Star Soultrait? Was it because 2-Star Soultraits were said to be harder to improve?

The other staff members didn't seem to understand the young man's excitement either, which further added to Michael's confusion.

If the young man found out that something was wrong with his Soultraits, he would immediately report it to his superiors. If that happened, his plan of hiding his other Soultraits, especially Extraction, would fail miserably.

Thus, he approached the young man once the testing device had been detached from his body.

"Can you tell me more about Soul Power?" Michael asked.

The young man nodded his head vigorously and looked excitedly toward Michael. After so long, someone was interested in the same hobby he had; research of Soultraits and Soul Power!

However, before he could say anything, more students appeared to get tested.

"Harry, stop flirting and come over. We have more work to do!" The annoyed woman said, destroying Harry's bubble.

"O-okay..." Harry responded the smile wiped away from his face.

"We can exchange contact details. That way, we can speak a little bit more about Soultraits and Soul Power when you have some more time to spare," Michael offered.

Harry's smile returned when Michael came up with this grandiose idea.

They exchanged their contact details and went their separate ways afterward.

'At least he didn't tell his superiors that something is odd...' Michael thought as he went ahead to the next assessment stations.

He was pretty sure that the SoulStar Fragments were the reason Lesser Enhancement's Soul Power was so high. Lesser Enhancement was not a normal 2-Star Soultrait, after all. The three SoulStar Fragments it absorbed had excessive energy after completing the second star.

The excessive energy formed the foundation of a 3rd star, indicating that it was stronger than normal 2-Star Soultraits.

Unfortunately, he had to reveal both Eagle Eyes and Lesser Enhancement to the outside world. Why was that the case?

It was pretty simple.

Alice had already seen Eagle Eyes. Thus, he had to show it, otherwise, Alice would start doubting him. A 3-Star Soultrait was rare enough to meet the Sapphirelake Military Academy's standards. However, Michael knew himself better than others.

He knew that he would use Lesser Enhancement more often in the future. It was highly likely that someone would find out about Lesser Enhancement once he started to use it more.

In the age of Starnet and technology, everyone could procure any kind of information that had been posted or stored somewhere.

That simply meant, the safest security system could get hacked and his information stolen.

Thus, Michael made his life easier by revealing that he had only two Soultraits. Nobody would expect that he was hiding more Soultraits because only those two exposed Soultraits had external physical features such as his glowing eyes and the white aura of Lesser Enhancement.

Spirit Whip was a non-physical attack that couldn't be seen, so Michael was not too worried about it being exposed. He could always say that one of his Artifacts had a mental-attack enchantment.

As for the reason he didn't expose Extraction. The 4-Star Soultrait was simply too powerful.

He didn't want to expose Extraction even though he could lie about its special perks. His lies could be proven wrong, and the truth exposed the moment someone with enough connections sensed that something was foul.

Connecting Extraction with his past transactions in the House of Witchery would be evidence enough to conclude that Extraction was an exceptional Soultrait.

If others were in his position, they might not think too much about the same things that bothered Michael. But Michael felt that his worries were justified and that he had to be well-prepared for the worst-case scenario.

Even if it was not necessary to do all of this, in the end, it was a safety measure and a means to decrease his worries.

He didn't want to wait until something bad happened before taking action and simply wanted to be well-prepared for everything.

That way, he could ensure his safety and the safety of those important to him!

Michael would be able to prevent unfortunate incidents like the invasion of the Lionhearts in his territory that way...

Chapter 108 Tests, Tests And More Tests

Michael's mind was still focused on the young staff member, Harry, and what he said about Soul Power and Soultraits when Michael was called over to his next test.

Since he met the basic requirements, Michael was led to the other side of the gym where his physical capabilities were tested.

His reflexes were tested, along with his burst speed, top speed, strength, flexibility, perception, and much more.

His score was adjusted according to his age, precisely the number of months and days that had passed since he entered the Origin Expanse for the first time. Michael was a Tier-1 Lord with high enhancements from several Artifacts.

Compared to his counterparts, who had entered the Origin Expanse a month, or a few months ago, his physical standards were much higher. Most of them had yet to advance to Tier-1, and bind Tier-1 Artifacts to their War Rune. They were simply not on par with him.

Peak Tier-0 Lords and Adventurers were as fast, strong, and perceptive as the most exceptional unawakened athletes of mankind. If that sounded unimpressive, it had to be known that Peak Tier-0 Awakened didn't have to train to achieve what unawakened athletes worked tirelessly for decades, by spending their whole energy and money to invest in their bodies by training, dieting, and using special nutrition solutions.

Yet, most of those exceptional athletes were only good at one or two things. A wrestler would hardly be able to contend with the fastest sprinter, after all.

On the other hand, even a chubby Peak Tier-0 Awakened would be able to win against the fastest sprinter and overpower the wrestler with their raw strength and speed.

Then again, Tier-1 Awakened were on a different level. Breaking through the barrier separating Tier-0 Awakened from the next Tier meant that their limit reached new heights. No Unawakened Human could compete with a Tier-1 Adventurer, or Lord, not just with their physical body at least.

Tier-1 Existences were on a level where the limits of a human's mortal body couldn't compete against their strengths.

Of course, shooting a laser gun at a Tier-1 Awakened would cause lethal damage, and kill them.

Michael had broken the limits of his mortal body already. Adding the enhancement of the Artifacts bound to him, his Agility was on par with a Mid Tier-1 Awakened. Even some Tier-1 Monsters wouldn't be able to catch up to him if he were to run away from them.

Meanwhile, his overall physical standards were close to Low-Mid Tier-1 Awakened. His reflexes were the strongest thanks to Tigerfang and the Siltang Bow's enhancement focusing on his perception. His Eagle Eyes' passive strengthening of his eyesight couldn't be ignored either. It played a huge role in increasing his score during the assessment.

Once he was done with the physical tests, Michael was led to the knowledge exam.

He couldn't even take a short break or find the time to change his sweaty clothes. The staff member led him straight to a small room with a single chair and table.

"Sit down and pay attention to your surroundings. The next test will start soon!" The young staff member instructed before he left the room.

He closed the door on his way out, leaving Michael in a dimly lit room.

'Is that what they want? Exhaust the applicants, throw them in a small room and then ... do what?'

Michael was a little confused. His gaze surveyed the room to see if something was odd, but there wasn't anything.

Only after a minute or two of utter silence did a holographic screen materialize in front of him.

It was a long bluish screen showing dozens of questions that had to be answered. There was even a countdown showing how much remaining time Michael had left to answer.

[58M:30S left]

'Was the holographic screen designated to only appear after 90 seconds, or did it appear after I was silent for a certain amount of time?' Michael wondered.

The aptitude assessment seemed to test far more characteristics of their applicants than it seemed at first glance. That was interesting, but even more reason to stay vigilant, and observe his surroundings thoroughly.

Michael wasn't afraid of the knowledge exam. Whenever he had some spare time, Michael studied the material Alice had sent him before diligently. Despite that, Michael studied less than what he wanted to since he had always been busy.

That was also why he was fortunate enough to be an Awakened whose brain had also been refined through his War Rune. He had always been a fast reader and pretty decent at memorizing content, and that was further improved through the War Rune's refinement.

He completed the knowledge exam and was notified that he could start the next test immediately. It was also held in the small, dimly lit room.

Several pictures of landscapes appeared on the walls of the small room. Long descriptions of the landscapes were written down below. The descriptions were detailed and mentioned all kinds of monsters, foreign races, and their location.

Some landscapes were in the Origin Expanse while others had been found on large, occupied planets.

Michael spent the next ten minutes intently reading and memorizing everything he could and as if on cue the landscapes and walls of texts disappeared.

Simultaneously, a new message popped up on the holographic screen.

[Please write down everything you can remember]

'As expected. A test to figure out how the applicant's mind works and if he can memorize the most crucial information of several places, or if the applicant will spew out jumbled nonsense.'

Michael had expected such a test to be a part of the aptitude assessment. The Sapphirelake Military Academy was a place to nourish Warriors and prepare for war, after all. It was not a place to nourish philosophers and pacifists.

Michael began writing and noted down everything he could remember. Once he was done another set of pictures and walls of texts appeared in front of him. However, this time, the pictures and the walls of texts were different.

The walls of texts were written in other languages, including the Old Tongue of the Third Epoch, the Origin Language, and the languages of foreign races. The pictures showed beings of a few races and certain memorials that provided enough hints about the content of the texts.

Michael couldn't understand most foreign languages because he had only been focusing on the Origin Language – as it was the only, and the most important language to learn for future Awakened. However, he could use the pictures and his knowledge of foreign races to write down everything important about these races, including their habits, characteristics, weaknesses, and crucial points to remember when fighting them.

He was a little bit worried about the last test because he was not certain if he would score high enough to pass it.

Fortunately, he did not dwell much on the outcome.

A staff member entered the room once he finished, and he led Michael to the second floor where many applicants were waiting in large open spaces.

"You can eat something in the cafeteria over there," The staff member said, pointing at a large door with the sign [Food Monsters] written on it.

After that, the staff member moved to another position and showed Michael the bathroom, the showers, and where he could request a combat suit for later.

"The final assessment will start at 4 pm. Good luck," The young man gave a brief overview of the place to Michael and left.

Michael checked the time and noticed that he had only an hour left to shower and eat something.

However, that was more than enough time before the final assessment would start.

Chapter 109 Real Combat

The final assessment was self-explanatory; Real Combat.

Michael didn't have much time to prepare himself because he was one of the last applicants to arrive for the final assessment.

He went for a quick shower, ate his fill, and observed the people around him. Each of them was his competitor for a spot in the Sapphirelake Military Academy.

'Is that all that is left out of 100,000 applicants?' Michael wondered. It was almost 4 pm and it seemed that the preliminary tests were over.

Not more than 100 young men and women were on the second floor of the Golden Sun College's Gym. That meant only 0.1% of applicants made it to the final assessment!

At 4 pm on the dot, everyone gathered in the open arena. A middle-aged man wearing a military uniform stepped in front of the young applicants, his eyes as cold as ice.

His gaze moved through the crowd of less than 100 applicants and a menacing smile appeared on his scarred face.

"Good afternoon dear applicants," He said in a husky voice, "My name is Silverian Schild, and I am one of the many Combat Instructors in the Sapphirelake Military Academy, and I was told to monitor the Real Combat assessment today."

Silverian Schild sounded nonchalant as he introduced himself to the crowd. He looked like he didn't want to be here.

Nonetheless, Michael couldn't help but feel his chest tightening. The pressure radiating from the Instructor was terrifying, and Silverian Schild was not even doing anything. He merely stood in front of them, one hand resting in the pocket.

"The rules for the Real Combat assessment are simple. We will put students against each other and give marks for the fights. Every student will have to fight three times before they can go home. In a few days, you'll be notified whether the Sapphirelake Military Academy will accept your application, or if you have been rejected."

When Silverian Schild finished the explanation, many Awakened looked at each other. Usually, the final assessment was different.

In the last few years, the final assessment had always been a fight against an Instructor to test the applicant's combat prowess. But this time they were supposed to fight other applicants? What if going all out led to their death?

"I don't want anyone to hold back," Silverian Schild said as if he could read the minds of some applicants.

He smiled devilishly as realization sank in the minds of the applicants, and it widened further when he saw the expression on the faces of the young Awakened.

"Let's start then!"

In the next ten minutes, the staff separated the open space into several arenas. Referees with enough strength to interfere in the battle of the young Awakened arrived, and a medic team set up a small medical tent for the worst-case scenario.

Once all preparations had been completed, the first few students were called up for their first fight, and the referees started the first round of Real Combat.

Michael watched the fights with great interest at first, but he quickly lost interest.

It didn't even take a full minute before his slightly excited expression turned into a deep frown.

"What is that?" He mumbled, as he watched the young Awakened fighting – if one could call it a fight, in the first place.

To Michael, the fight looked more like a friendly spar between two best friends, who would never want to hurt each other.

The young Awakened of the first round was too afraid to go all out and cripple their opponents, possibly even kill them, and were playing safe.

"How were they even able to survive in the Origin Expanse like this?" Michael murmured in utter confusion.

He had been disgusted with himself for killing monsters before, but he did it nonetheless. Michael left his comfort zone and killed the monsters that threatened his territory first. Now, he had gained enough confidence to attack monsters living far away from his territory.

It was not as if Michael didn't feel bad for killing them, however, the Origin Expanse was a place where the strong devoured the weak to become even stronger. Since Michael was stronger, he devoured those weaker than him.

Silverian Schild and his assistants stared at the friendly tussle with an impassive faces. Their expression didn't change watching the friendly spar-like fights, and Michael could slowly unravel what was going on.

'They're disqualifying those who're too scared to fight seriously. Is that the point of fighting other students? To figure out who can be a good soldier and fight others at command, and cripple, or even kill them?'

Then there were those spars in which one opponent was considerably stronger than the other. In such cases, most young Awakened who were too afraid to fight seriously were getting thrashed by their opponents. However, that was something everyone should have expected when one party held back while the other went all out with the intention to win by all means.

'I won't hold back.' Michael told himself when it was finally his turn to enter the arena.

"Michael Fang versus Niklas Liekhofen. Please enter the arena and prepare for battle!"

Michael, who had been ready to enter the arena, stopped in his tracks. He looked through the open space and found Niklas. Niklas Liekhofen stared back at him, his eyes shot wide open.

'This fool made it to the final assessment? That's to be expected, I guess,' Michael thought before he gave it a shrug.

It was not as if it mattered whether Niklas Liekhofen made it to the final assessment or not. Michael felt that it was much better to have someone like Niklas Liekhofen as his first opponent in the Real Combat assessment, in the first place. He wouldn't have to feel guilty for beating the shit out of his first opponent!

With that in mind, Michael entered the arena, where he patiently waited for Niklas. He expected Niklas to make fun of him, but Niklas Liekhofen remained silent. He stared at Michael while gritting his teeth.

Niklas clearly recalled the archer competition and Michael's archery skills. He hated himself for losing, but even more so Michael for defeating him. According to him, Michael and Kaleb cheated him in the competition. They were at fault for his loss and the humiliation he suffered afterward!

A huge broadsword manifested in Niklas' hands, and a bluish leather chestplate covered his upper body as he moved into combat position.

Michael materialized the Onyx Dragon Armor Set, and Tigerfang at once. He wielded Tigerfang in front of him and entered his combat stance as well.

Even if Niklas had barely reached the Late stage of Tier-0, Michael wouldn't underestimate his opponent. It was possible for Tierless Lords to defeat someone at Tier-1. Michael was the best example for something like that. His Soultraits, the enhancement of his Artifacts, and his combat prowess allowed him to fight Tier-1 Monsters while he was Tierless.

"I won't hold back, bastard!" Niklas cursed through his gritted teeth.

Michael didn't respond. Instead, he activated his Eagle Eyes and angled his body slightly.

The referee looked at the two combatants and lifted his hand. His hand shot down and his voice thundered through the arena.

"Fight!!"

The moment the referee's voice rang out, Niklas charged forward. A bronze-colored aura enveloped his entire body, and his speed accelerated further.

Michael's Artifacts were engulfed by a white light, further enhancing their external enhancement.

He pushed his feet off the ground and shot forward like a cannonball.

Two blades made huge arcs through the air, and blood splattered.

A second after the battle started, a loose arm flew through the air followed by an ear-splitting scream.

Chapter 110 Merciless

Michael didn't show any mercy.

He went all-out and shot across the arena like a cannonball, slicing off Niklas' sword arm with a single attack.

Michael was not only a Tier higher than Niklas, but he had multiple other means to enhance his strength further. Niklas's Tierless Artifacts and his 2-Star Martial Aura were not enough to keep up with Michael's speed, and strength.

He could only scream as Tigerfang's razor-sharp blade cut through his flesh, muscles, and bones.

Michael hadn't expected Niklas to be defeated that easily. He stared at the pitiful figure of Niklas with disgust and shook his head.

"To think that I allowed someone like you to bully me in school," Michael mumbled in a voice loud enough only for Niklas to hear before he turned to the referee.

"I think you should announce the winner and tend to his wound, otherwise, you won't be able to save his arm," He suggested in a neutral tone though his gaze was ice-cold. There was not a trace of guilt or remorse in his eyes. It was almost like he didn't feel anything right now.

"Michael Fang won the fight!"

The referee acted quickly. He called the medic team over, rushed to the arm that had been cut off cleanly, and handed it over while hoping that the leading Doctor with her 4-Star Healing Current Soultrait could heal Niklas Liekhofen, and reattach his arm.

The referee knew that he had been too slow in reacting and should have taken the necessary steps without Michael having to suggest anything to him. But then he had not expected the situation to

escalate so suddenly. The earlier fights barely caused any injuries, which was why the referee was a little bit too slow. Fortunately, Michael didn't pierce Niklas' heart and merely cut off his arm.

With the advancement of technology and Soultraits that could be used for medical purposes, it was no problem to reattach limbs. Even the regrowth of lost limbs could be stimulated with the use of rare and high-ranking Soultraits.

That was also why cutting off arms and legs could be considered an ordinary injury on the battlefield. But they were not on the battlefield right now, and the Awakened were not fully trained Soldiers either. Some of them weren't even daring enough to fight their opponents seriously, fearing that they might injure them.

And that was why those young Awakened were terror-struck and staring blankly at Michael, thanking their fate that they had not been paired opposite the monster. They could not even begin to imagine what would happen to them if they were to face Michael in the arena.

The thought alone was enough to wreak havoc in their minds. Their eyes began to quiver, and their legs felt like jelly.

Meanwhile, Silverian Schild and the assistants made notes of the battle and its result.

"Looks like they came from the same school," One of the assistants mentioned.

The assistant had opened the assessment forms of Michael and Niklas Liekhofen even before the battle started. He had noticed that there was some tension between the two combatants.

"Is that so?" Silverian Schild asked.

He glanced at the assessment forms of the two combatants as well and realized something.

"Graduate from the Elite Class of the Golden Sun Exlor High School. His background is very ordinary. Michael Fang...why does that name ring a bell?" Silverian murmured. He looked at Michael sharply for a few seconds, but he couldn't quite put his finger on why he felt so strangely familiar.

Only after his gaze moved to Tigerfang did he recall something, or rather someone, who was very interested in a particular Epic Artifact.

'Is that the guy she mentioned before?'

Niklas was being tended to by the Medic with the 4-Star Healing Current. A warm and soothing light engulfed Niklas' cut-off arm and the severely bleeding arm stump. The veins and muscles at the cut spot began to wiggle while Niklas began to groan in pain.

His arm felt super sensitive at the moment, and his pain intensified as the Medic put the cut-off arm back to the arm stump. The other medics used several machines to stimulate the growth of flesh and muscles, while small nanomachines were utilized to connect the severed veins, and muscles, fusing it together.

After ten minutes of hard work, Niklas' arm had been reattached. The medic team sighed in relief and returned to the small medical tent they'd constructed.

They took Niklas with them and ignored that their patient was glaring at Michael. Niklas was in pain and angry, however, he couldn't say anything to Michael, whose eyes stared into the depths of his soul.

Gone was the puny little kid who would cower before Niklas. Now, Michael stared defiantly in the young man's eyes who had bullied him in school. Instead, it was Niklas, who couldn't endure Michael's intense glare anymore. Niklas shut his mouth and disappeared in the medical tent with the medic team.

While this glaring match was in progress, the rest of the participants had gone deathly still. An eerie silence filled the arena. At one point, the other combatants stopped fighting as well. They looked over to see what happened, and a terrifying scene entered their view.

A massive amount of blood had splattered across the arena.

Upon seeing that, their faces turned pale, and their eyes widened in shock as well.

Did a monster wreak havoc next to them?

"Why did someone put these guys together?!" One of the combatants asked loud enough for everyone to hear, but nobody answered his question.

The Real Combat assessment was fair and pitted Awakened of the same age against each other. The Awakened had roughly spent the same time in the Origin Expanse and could show off how far they had come in that duration.

Of course, everyone had different starting points. Some received special training for more than a decade before they turned 18, and a massive pile of resources, while others started from scratch when they first entered the Origin Expanse.

The only luck factor inside the Origin Expanse was related to the territory's location, and what Summon you would obtain from the Fortune Summoning Scroll.

However, it didn't change the fact that ordinary people would have fewer resources when they started their journey in the Origin Expanse. They lacked Artifacts, Summoning Scrolls to expand their population, and various techniques, which ordinary Awakened could not afford for themselves, and their subjects.

Ordinary Awakened would struggle in the beginning while descendants of bigger families would have a head start.

The more subjects they possessed, the stronger their Soultrait would be. Simultaneously, with more and stronger subjects, it was easier to hunt. That resulted in more energy shares from more monsters that had been hunted by their subjects.

Even if their Links of Loyalty were not firm, the massive advantage of Lords with connections and backing was not to be underestimated.

However, Michael was younger than Niklas, and he didn't have a wealthy family backing him secretly.

Yet, he had managed to overpower Niklas and crippled him with a single strike.

It seemed that a dark horse had appeared in the midst of the Real Combat assessment and that it was thirsting for blood.

While the other participants stared at him in shock, Michael left the arena calmly. He had won the first battle in the blink of an eye and showed clearly that he was not afraid of shedding blood. His gaze traveled through the large open space, taking in the terrified faces of the other combatants before his eyes landed on Silverian Schild. The Combat Instructor returned his gaze before he turned back to the arena.

The Real Combat assessment had to continue. There was no time to waste!

"Hey, sorry for bothering you, but I saw your fight and heard someone talk about you before," A skinny young man approached Michael with an amiable smile.

Niklas was the only one from his class so technically nobody was supposed to know him. However, when he saw where the skinny man was pointing, he could only frown.

'What are they doing here?'

"Is it true that you don't have a backer and that your entire strength comes from your great luck?"