

Supreme Lord 21

Chapter 21 Summoning

'Why would I receive such useless memories? I don't need the wicked Spear Arts...' Michael grumbled.

'I won't use it, so why give me these memories in the first place?'

Michael figured that the white wisp had been Fenrir's extracted memories. While that was an interesting piece of information since it told Michael that he could expand his knowledge by killing other intelligent beings and extracting their memories, which would in turn allow him to expand his knowledge easily, he was more focused on the content of the memories.

'There is not much about Fenrir's life to gauge from the memories. Only certain encounters, his practice of the wicked Spear Arts, and his hunting experience as an Archer make up for most of them. His Divine Eyes Soultrait was perfect for becoming an archer, that's for sure,' Michael thought while digesting the first chunk of memories.

Even if he was to rush his mind, digesting all memories would require quite a while. However, they had no more time to waste.

"Dispose of Fenrir's body, please. If you want to, you can use his body to bait Monsters close to the protection barrier and attack them. You can use the silver spear and you're also a 1st Tier Battle Maid, so that shouldn't be too much of an issue," Michael instructed before he thought about something. He then carefully added, "I will follow you later after I finish summoning new subjects."

It was about time to get his territory rolling, increase the number of his people and start for real. They had more than enough time to get going with seven hours of sunlight left, and it would be wasteful not to use them.

Tiara didn't hesitate and responded instantaneously to his command. She bowed to her Master and grasped the silver spear with her right hand before dragging Fenrir's body through the clearing with her left.

Michael felt a little cruel throwing the first ancestor's body out of the protection barrier to turn him into Monster bait, but it was self-explanatory why Fenrir's body had to be disposed of. His first impression of

the new subjects wouldn't necessarily be good if they were to see Fenrir's corpse. Michael took several more factors into consideration and chose to dispose of Fenrir's body right in the heart of the territory of ferocious Monsters.

He was not proud of his decision, but it was the best he could think of considering his current situation.

'I am pretty lucky with Tiara...her Link of Loyalty is strong, and she didn't question me even after I gave her the orders,' Michael thought as he retrieved all summoning scrolls and summoning scroll fragments from his War Rune.

He had 73 summoning scroll fragments, which transformed into two ordinary summoning scrolls, leaving him with 23 fragments. He lacked two summoning scroll fragments to create a third summoning scroll.

With the new addition of summoning scrolls, Michael now possessed a dozen ordinary summoning scrolls and a Tracker summoning scroll.

He ripped the scrolls' seals one after another and threw them in the air when he reached the Summoning Gate. The summoning scrolls unfolded before they shot inside the Summoning Gate.

The energy pool inside the Summoning Gate rippled while the outlines of 11 people formed. There was no brightly shining star which meant that the 11 individuals were all starless summons.

Only a few seconds passed but the starless summons emerged from the energy pool. They were wearing ordinary clothes and didn't look anything special. Amongst the 11 summons, seven were men and four were women. This ratio was fairly good for Michael's purpose. After all, he was in dire need of strong laborers right now.

After the starless summons emerged from the Summoning Gate, one of the stars etched on the Gate's metallic surface began to shine brightly. A 1-Star Summon stepped out of the energy pool, greeting his Lord with a light bow.

The 1-Star Summon's clothes were no different than the 11 starless Summons, but that was not something Michael paid any attention to.

'A young man with a skinny physique...he is definitely no warrior,' Michael figured, while giving him a slight nod. His attention had never completely drifted from the Summoning Gate, so he smiled when two additional stars began to shine brightly, indicating the birth of a 3-Star Summon.

That was an unexpected and pleasant surprise. He knew that Specific Summoning Scrolls couldn't be starless summons. Thus, Michael expected the Tracker to be a 1-Star, or 2-Star summon at most. Of course, he wouldn't reject a 3-Star Tracker. It was a great gift, which he welcomed with open arms.

The Tracker stepped out of the energy pool without hesitation. She took note of Michael and bowed deeply. Michael reciprocated the greeting and observed her from head to toe for a moment.

'She is very athletic, wears better clothes than the others, and her eyes are sharper as well. She is a good summon,' Michael summarized, nodding his head faintly.

He gathered the 13 new subjects, cleared his throat, and smiled lightly.

"My name is Michael Fang, and I am the Lord of this territory. I summoned you because I need your help in creating a place where everyone can feel at home. This will require lots of effort, and I hope that everyone can diligently work toward the same end goals- our survival, and to pave a way to live a prosperous life!" He gave a short introductory speech covering the key points and welcomed his new subjects.

Just when he closed his mouth, Michael recalled something so he added as an afterthought, "It would help if you could introduce yourselves and tell me what job you pursued in the past. That way, I can make sure that I won't assign you to work that doesn't suit you!"

Currently, the Links of Loyalty were forged between Michael and his Summons. He could clearly feel the 13 new links, which gave him a rough understanding of the Summons' strength and how they felt right now. Their emotions were a mess and they looked confused, but they didn't seem completely clueless.

The Tracker was the most composed, but that was what Michael had expected from her. It told him that the Will of the Origin Expanse provided her with more pieces of information before she was summoned than those of a lower star rating.

"My name is Blaire Tracer, but you can just call me Tracer. That was my title, either way. I am 20 years old and a Tracker, and I worked for the Logorian Empire before I was killed during a suicidal mission," The Tracker, Blaire Tracer, introduced herself. She sounded calm and didn't seem to be upset about her past, or the fact that she died and that she was resurrected.

This impressed Michael quite a bit.

"M-m-my name is Williams Heart, I am 18 years old, and an Architect Apprentice. I died...do I really have to say it...my Lord?" The young boy, the 1-Star Summon, introduced himself, or he was trying to before he began to tremble like a leaf caught in a storm.

"It is more than enough if you tell me your name and state your line of work in the past. I won't force you to tell me more, even if I am curious about everyone's past," Michael said in a gentle tone.

Williams sighed in relief and bowed deeply to his Lord. Michael continued to smile before he diverted his attention to the other new subjects. Their stiff expressions mirrored the turmoil in their minds. They had yet to fully comprehend what had happened, and Michael gave them the time they needed to put two and two together.

In the next ten minutes, the remaining starless summons introduced themselves one by one after overcoming their initial hesitation. It helped a lot that Michael didn't push anyone and that he remained patient with them. Everyone could clearly tell that the Link of Loyalty artificially enhanced their loyalty, but it was also apparent that their Lord was not a bad guy. He was giving his best.

Thus, they listened intently as Michael explained what their tasks were for the rest of the day.

He retrieved a blueprint from his War Rune and handed it to Williams Heart, "I am not sure if you have experience in overseeing a construction site, but I believe that you can do it. Just give your best!"

Williams' hand began to shake upon retrieving the treehouse complex blueprint. He trembled while inspecting the blueprint, feeling nervous and not confident enough to live up to the trust his Lord gave him unconditionally.

"I...I will try my best!" He stammered, which was enough for Michael. He gave him a thumbs up and took a deep breath.

'Step one completed. Now let's see how we can help Tiara,' Michael thought, feeling that it was about time for him to actively participate in the hunts.

He represented his territory and he had to become stronger to make sure that his subjects could look up to him and rely on him even in testing times.

Being a Lord was not easy, but Michael never expected it to be, in the first place. He knew that it would be hard to become a good Lord, however, he was ready to give his best.

That was the least he could do.

'Step two, here I go!'

Chapter 22 Combined Forces

With enough resources extracted and tools created with the sturdiest materials Michael could extract at this moment, there shouldn't be too much of a problem with the construction of the treehouse complex.

The rainforest provided all raw materials, and Extraction enhanced them by extracting the sturdiest and most potent resources. Thus, Michael was not too worried. He was sure that his subjects could create a treehouse complex until nightfall.

Even if they weren't done by then, the wooden manor had enough space to fit everyone.

'One 1-Star Architect Apprentice and a 3-Star Tracker with exceptional agility. None of them has any combat powers...but it's not that I expected something big,' Michael thought as he strode through the clearing. He left the clearing and found himself near the protection barrier a few minutes later, looking for Tiara.

It hadn't been long since Tiara left to hunt but she had already killed a monster. The energy influx passing through their Link of Loyalty was unmistakable evidence of that, and it calmed his nerves much more than expected.

After he killed Fenrir, Michael's biggest worry was that none of his subjects would be able to kill Low Tier-1 Monsters. It was great that he was wrong with his guess.

'Hunting with Tiara will make everything a lot easier, that's good.'

Michael was already strong for a new Lord, but he was not at the 1st Tier yet. Not even the enhancement provided by a Tierless Epic Artifact was high enough to make up for the gap of strength between a Low Tierless and a Tier-1 entity.

"Master, you've arrived!" Tiara exclaimed with a vibrant smile before she bowed politely the moment she saw him.

A pack of Tier-1 Monsters was currently trying to drag Fenrir's corpse farther away from the protection barrier. They were hovering around the protection barrier cautiously and backed off the moment Tiara moved.

One monster had already experienced the fury of the Battle Maid from the Silverfang Tigerfolk, and the others didn't want to experience the same fate as that poor soul.

Michael watched their face-off with little interest. He approached the protection barrier and pressed his palm against it.

'There is almost no resistance,' He noticed with a bemused look before he shot out.

Michael took a single stride forward to reach the monster corpse, which he grasped with his left hand to store inside his War Rune. His War Rune was large enough to store a single monster corpse. That was more than enough in the current situation.

The monster corpse disappeared, shocking the remaining monsters outside the protection barrier. They hadn't expected their dead brethren to disappear just like that. It took most of them a second to realize what had happened. Only then did they move.

There was only one Monster that reacted faster than the others. It shot forward and pounced at Michael.

Michael was not yet inside the protection barrier, but his movements were calm and composed. His Eagle Eyes Soultrait was already activated, and he detected the sudden acceleration of the Gem Jaguar ahead of him.

He could jump backward, and easily get inside the protection barrier, but Michael did something else. He pushed his feet away from the ground and pushed them to the side. Simultaneously, he manifested Tigerfang from the War Rune and tilted it.

Tigerfang's razor-sharp edge pointed at the Gem Jaguar while his body moved to the right. Michael could change his trajectory and initiate a counterattack, knowing that the Monster's sudden acceleration would make it harder to change its direction in an instant. However, Michael didn't risk it.

He summoned Tigerfang to keep the Gem Jaguar at a safe distance and distract it. The Gem Jaguar's entire focus was on Michael as expected. It slowed down at once to change its trajectory and attacked Michael. As a result, it was attacked viciously from the side as searing pain spread out from its chest.

The Gem Jaguar forgot about Tiara, and that she had been standing right behind the protection barrier. Tiara burst forward when Michael pushed to the right side, noticing that the Gem Jaguar was focused only on her Master. Making use of that, she used her full strength, reached the Gem Jaguar in an instant, and lashed out with all her might.

The silver spear penetrated the Gem Jaguar's chest before it was viciously twisted and yanked out in a smooth motion. A moment later, Tiara had already retreated behind the protection barrier where Michael arrived a fraction of a second later.

He gave her a small smile before retrieving the corpse he had collected before.

"I have enough space. We can continue." He said nonchalantly, though his eyes quivered as he looked at the miserably dying Gem Jaguar.

Even if he was fine with being around dead bodies, and extracting them with his Soultrait, the sight of someone dying, forget about killing someone, was still a little hard on his stomach.

However, he knew that he had to become stronger to be a good and powerful Lord. This didn't only involve his physical strength, but also his mental strength.

'I need to get stronger!' He told himself, gritting his teeth while watching the death of the Gem Jaguar.

Tiara's lips parted and she wanted to say something about his reckless actions, but she shut her mouth only a moment later. It was not as if Michael's tactic had been bad. He clearly calculated the Gem Jaguar's movements and acted accordingly. Even without her interference, Michael would have made it safely inside the protection barrier before the Gem Jaguar reached him.

By then, the Gem Jaguar would have been an easy target that was unable to deal with any attacks while faced with Tigerfang's razor-sharp blade.

"As you wish, Master. Let's continue!" She responded after a moment, getting into combat stance to continue the fight against the remaining Tier-1 Monsters.

Michael charged out of the protection barrier to collect the Gem Jaguar's corpse and become the remaining monsters' bait. His perception was higher than others thanks to Tigerfang, and the Eagle Eyes Soultrait. He could react fast enough to the actions of a Tier-1 Monster even if he was not strong enough to fight it head-on. He could evade the attacks and tire the monsters out.

Meanwhile, Tiara moved rapidly, attacking the monsters whenever she found an opening. Her movements were fast and her attacks deadly. Being a trained member of the Silverfang Tigerfolk, her agility and flexibility was bound to be exceptional. However, that didn't mean Tiara could fight in sync with just anyone.

Whether it was their firm Link of Loyalty, or their natural compatibility, Tiara and Michael were able to deal with the remaining monsters within ten minutes and gain an upper hand.

They killed seven monsters in twenty minutes, and they were not yet done with today's hunt.

Several hours later, they returned to the clearing. Tiara retrieved a total of 30 corpses from her War Rune while Michael retrieved two monster corpses. The storage space of his War Rune expanded a lot after he actively participated in the hunt of nearly three dozen Low Tier-1 Monsters.

This was helpful for the fourth step of the plan he came up with a while ago.

'It is much more beneficial to go out hunting with multiple people. I wonder how efficient we would have been with Fenrir,' Michael wondered, just to shake his head and discard that thought. 'I killed him, so what does it matter? Thinking about it doesn't change anything!'

It was already late and less than one hour was left before nightfall. However, Michael had yet to loot the monster corpses, forgetting about extracting them to dissect their bodies properly and preserve the necessary body parts.

Michael sat down a few meters away from the campfire which Tiara used to prepare dinner for everyone, and he began the extraction of thirty-two monster corpses.

Even by the time dinner was ready, he was not done yet, but Michael got up and walked over to the campfire. He ate with the others and tried to get to know his subjects more. His second day in the Origin Expanse had been far more taxing than the first day, however, Michael felt more comfortable now.

On the first day, he had a bad feeling, which proved to be correct. Now that Fenrir was no more, he felt much better. The thought of going to sleep soundly without bothering about the possible dangers inside his territory was not foreign anymore. He was looking forward to it so that he could gauge others' actions better and prevent future mishaps.

"My Lord, we haven't finished the first treehouse yet, but I think the rainforest trees in this area are big and sturdy. The biggest trees can hold three treehouse complexes as long as we construct them with the same sturdy materials you've provided. Will that be alright, or should we spread the treehouse complexes at first?" Williams Heart asked after he gathered all his courage to reveal what he had on his mind.

Everyone had slowly warmed up to Michael as their Lord. They were still hesitant to speak their mind because Michael and his personal maid were powerful given the huge pile of Tier-1 monster corpses lying not too far from the campfire. If they said something wrong, nobody would be able to help them. They would have to face their Lord's wrath and might even be tortured. That was something they wanted to prevent.

However, they could also tell that Michael was not an ordinary or regular Lord either. Every summon recalled parts of their lives before they'd been summoned, and some memories were bound to be about Lords, whether it was rumors or something they witnessed first-hand.

"How about you create two single treehouse complexes and test a triple treehouse complex afterward? I will summon more subjects tomorrow. You can easily finish two single treehouse complexes by then," Michael suggested, and Williams nodded his head, without saying anything further.

He patted his chest to calm his wildly palpitating heart while praising himself inwardly. It took a great deal of courage to speak up to their Lord, but he had not only done it but the Lord had even accepted his proposal!

After dinner, everyone was exhausted. However, nobody went to sleep before the Lord did. They watched their Lord as he continued to dissect the monster corpses one after another using his miraculous Soultrait. Everyone wanted to help, which Tiara took as an opportunity to command them.

Tiara instructed the summons about where they should keep the dissected body parts, what to do with the blood-filled flasks, and so on.

In less than two hours, Michael finished dissecting the last corpse. He was dead-tired, but a satisfactory smile blossomed on his face that reached his eyes.

The drop rate of items generated by the Will of the Origin Expanse was much higher than he expected after Extraction had been enhanced, and he impatiently awaited the arrival of the next morning.

The third day was about to start, and the preparations for his first trip back home were made.

It was about time to show the true value of his territory and Soultrait!

Chapter 23 Artifact

"236 Summoning Scroll Fragments, three Unknown Summoning Scrolls, one Artifact, a stable blueprint, a piece of a map...that's not bad, not bad at all!" Michael mumbled while munching on the meat that had been prepared for breakfast.

He slept soundly on the second night in the Origin Expanse, and his energy had been fully replenished. His mind had also been rebooted and refreshed.

"Master, the Summoning Gate materialized another summoning scroll," Tiara informed, handing Michael the scroll.

He accepted it and nodded his head subtly.

'With the gains from yesterday's hunt, I can summon more than ten subjects. Should I focus on letting everybody settle and get familiar with my territory for the next few days, or should I keep hunting? I don't even know how the region around me looks. Maybe Tier-1 Monsters are my smallest problem...'
Michael noticed that many things needed work and improvement. It would be much easier with a few powerful combat units by his side, but Tiara was all he had.

She was powerful, but it was clear that her combat awareness and experience were not comparable to Fenrir's. Michael was not sure what kind of Soultrait she had either. Tiara was not allowed to speak about it due to the regulations of the Origin Expanse's Will, and she didn't seem to be utilizing her Soultrait secretly either.

It was a little bit annoying but not something Michael would ponder about for hours knowing that he wouldn't receive a useful answer.

"Before taking action, I should summon more subjects. Williams and the others will need more help to finish the treehouse complexes," He mumbled, getting up from the wooden stool.

Michael made his way to the Summoning Gate before he merged the Summoning Scroll Fragments in his possession together. Since he had still more than 20 fragments from the day before, a total of 10 Unknown Summoning Scrolls formed from the fragments. Adding the complete scrolls to his possession,

14 subjects emerged from the energy pool after Michael ripped the seals away on the scrolls one after another.

13 starless subjects – nine men and four women – emerged from the energy pool. All of them were wearing the same clothes just like the subjects he summoned the day before. Following the starless subjects, one 1-Star summon emerged from the Summoning Gate. It was a young man in his mid-20s tightly holding a Staff in his left hand.

His name was Heran Tarn and he was a Lesser Tamer.

When everyone introduced himself, Michael was quite surprised to find out that he got hold of a Lesser Tamer as well. For now, the Lesser Tamer's power might be considered less useful, but this could quickly change. The Lesser Tamer's power could come in handy to control livestock easily, or tame lower-ranked monsters for combat.

If a Tamer raised a monster from infancy, it would even be possible to create a cavalry, or simply have mounts to carry him and others around with much less trouble.

'It might be a little bit annoying in the rainforest, but once I create trails through the rainforest it would be very helpful and timesaving to have a docile, agile monster mount,' Michael thought with confidence.

However, for now, the Lesser Tamer's unique trait was not helpful, so he sent him to help construct the treehouse complexes.

"Should I try to get hold of monster eggs when I return home tomorrow?" Michael mumbled, wondering if he should tweak his plan a little.

Initially, Michael wanted to leave the Origin Expanse the moment the War Rune's connection had been confirmed. That was usually the case after spending 72 hours in the Origin Expanse. By selling the near-perfectly dissected monster corpses, their blood, Monster Cores, and exotic body parts such as the Gem Jaguars' Gemstones, Michael wanted to have sufficient funds to purchase everything he needed until the protection barrier would disappear.

Unfortunately, the space of Michael's War Rune was still not humongous. To purchase everything needed and carry it back to the Origin Expanse, he would have to be able to travel back and forth several times. But that was currently not possible because the War Rune's connection would only be perfectly solidified once it had been refined to the 1st Tier.

'Recharging the War Rune should only take a few days. If I can go back tomorrow, and a second time two days before the protection barrier lifts, it shouldn't be too difficult to protect my territory even in the rainforest full of Tier-1 Monsters...'

Michael had to make the best of the given circumstances, but that was easier said than done. Certain things didn't get easier even after he racked his brain to think of a solution. Purchasing a few 1-Star Warrior Summoning Scrolls would help a lot, but it was not certain that the Warriors would be enough to ensure the territory's safety. After all, the rainforest was still an unknown region with a high likelihood of inhabiting stronger monsters.

"If you're worried about the rainforest, we can send out Blaire Tracer, Master. She told me that she was never good at work which required her to use her hands. She was a little embarrassed that she made so many obvious mistakes when she was supposed to help the others in constructing the treehouse complex, and told me about it last night," Tiara proposed.

"Sending out Tracer? She might be agile, but we're talking about a region overpopulated with Tier-1 Monsters. Tracer is a Tierless Tracker who has yet to start refining energy!" Michael couldn't agree to something that risky. If Tracer was also Tier-1 – just like Tiara – he would agree, but this was way too dangerous.

"Blaire Tracer will be fine, and she wants to do that, Master. We need the information she can procure as well," Tiara tried to convince just as Blaire Tracer approached them. She heard her name and concluded that Tiara had proposed what they had discussed last night.

Her expression changed in an instant, and it looked like she started to glow.

"Please send me out to procure information about the rainforest, my lord!" Blaire requested politely after she rushed over to Michael to give him a deep bow.

A frown appeared on Michael's face, but he nodded his head after a while. Even if he wanted to protect his subjects from as much harm as possible, the unknown worried him a lot.

"Alright, you can go," He said at last, "But don't even think of getting injured. We have nothing to treat wounds, not even bandages!"

Michael was sorry that he had to push the responsibility of exploring the rainforest outside the protection barrier to Blaire Tracer, but she didn't seem to mind. On the other hand, she was happy, bowed deeply, and disappeared after finishing her preparations.

'As long as she's happy, there is no need for me to feel bad...I guess,' He thought, turning to one of the most important drops he received from a Low Tier-1 Frenzy Deer.

It was a Bow, an Artifact created by the Will, and made from the Frenzy Deer's Antlers and tendons.

Even if the Artifact was Tierless with a common quality star rating of one star, the power it could unleash once fully charged was quite high. Michael didn't have any Arrows to use it with, but using Extraction allowed him to extract sturdy wooden shafts from the rainforest's trees. He used them to test out the Artifact's strength.

Unfortunately, wooden shafts were simply makeshift arrows and not comparable to proper arrows. That was something even a rookie archer could tell, let alone Michael whose memories predominantly revolved around archery and a few other memories.

Michael finished organizing his first ancestor's memories, and he learned quite a lot. Most memories were not useful right now, but Michael was certain that he could make use of them in the future.

For one, Michael learned that the wicked Spear Art required exceptional eyesight and the ability to see what others couldn't even perceive and forget about seeing. He also found out that Fenrir became a Spearman solely because of the wicked Spear Art. He had been an Archer before – an exceptional archer at that.

Fenrir's archery skills had been impeccable, but he switched to the spear once he found the wicked spear arts. That was just too bad because Michael would have loved to receive more memories of Fenrir as an archer rather than his memories about the wicked Spear Art.

'Looks like I can become a pretty good archer in no time as well,' Michael thought with a subtle smile on his lips, 'At least, some of his memories are useful. With a little bit training, I can become an expert Archer using this bastard's memories, experience, and a weakened version of his Soultrait!'

Extracting everything from Fenrir had been extremely useful. Michael gained so much in return. Of course, he lost a Heroic Summon as a result, but that could also be considered an advantage. His Heroic Summon would have definitely lost his sanity in no time. Removing Fenrir was the only way to ensure his own safety and the survival of his territory.

Thus, after pondering over it for a while now, Michael concluded that he had done the right thing.

Michael would kill Fenrir again, even if time would turn back 24 hours. That was enough for him to understand that he did the right thing and that it was not worth dwelling on the what ifs any longer.

After he justified his actions to his conscience and accepted them at last, Michael began to work hard, once again.

He helped procure the purest and most resilient resources – to build the treehouse complexes – using Extraction. Simultaneously, he got to know his people more. They were a little confused at first, wondering why their Lord was so...kind, bubbly, and generous, rather than a stern commander who ordered everyone around while watching from far away.

However, they liked this kind of Lord much better, especially since he seemed reliable and quite powerful as well.

The day passed in the blink of an eye, and time seemed to slow down when Tracer returned to the territory, holding something in her arms while bleeding profusely.

"What the hell did you do?"

Chapter 24 Report

It had been close to ten hours since Blaire Tracer had left to explore the rainforest, and Michael had been impatiently waiting for her.

But what he didn't expect to see when he heard that she returned was a profusely bleeding Tracker with three yellowish stones in her arms.

The stones were shaped like rugby balls, just yellow and a lot heavier.

"What happened?" He asked the moment he saw her sitting on one of the beds inside the wooden manor.

She was currently being tended to with a simple piece of cloth that was used as a makeshift bandage to stop the bleeding on her shoulder. A claw must have pierced her deeply not too long ago.

"I—..." Blaire began, only for Michael to lift his hand, stopping her midway.

"If you think that the injury is too serious, we could burn it. After all, we don't have any potions or healers yet!" Michael proposed. The last few words were clearly directed at Blaire even though he was speaking to Tiara.

"I made a tight bandage with some cloth. If the cloth soaks up all the blood in five minutes, we must stop the bleeding in a different way, burning the wound, if necessary," Tiara nodded while Blaire's face was drained of all its color.

Michael threw a glance at her as if to say 'I told you to be careful!', but he didn't say anything. Instead, he motioned for Blaire to start narrating her report.

She took a moment to calm her wildly beating heart before she began to speak.

"In the first two hours of my exploration, I circled the proximity of the territory to test if the monsters in the rainforest are highly perceptive and notice my presence right away, or if my skills are enough to travel through the rainforest unhindered. After I was certain that it wouldn't be a problem to explore the area a little farther away, I spent some time traveling carefully through the rainforest.

I found a few stronger monsters but overall, Tier-1 Monsters mostly populate this area of the rainforest. Their population is oddly high, but that was the only thing I noticed," Blaire took a few deep breaths and drank some water from her leather flask.

Her breathing was ragged, and a thin coat of sweat was glistening on her forehead, but she continued her report without paying anymore attention to her physical state.

"Roughly four hours ago, I found feathers of a Bilrox near a well-hidden cavern entrance. The entrance was covered in bushes and surrounded by huge trees. However, I could see a few donkey-sized lizards inside the cave. My gut feeling told me not to enter the cave, so I tried to investigate from a safe distance. There were many feathers, hinting that there might be a Bilrox Horde.

I was a little confused as to what an exotic monster such as the Bilrox is doing in the rainforest and began my research. It didn't take much effort to find a Bilrox Horde that had been captured and fenced. They're held captive by some sort of Gorilla-like Humans, or human-like Gorillas, I am not too sure what they are, to be honest."

"Either way, it looks like there is another Lord's territory only a few hours away from ours. They seem very strong and have a numerical advantage. The weakest of them is at the 1st Tier."

Blaire wanted to say more but she seemed too weak right now. She began to shiver, and one didn't have to be an expert to tell that her condition was worsening.

Michael locked eyes with Tiara, who nodded her head after she took a short glance at the blood-soaked cloth. Tiara left the room to prepare to cauterize the deep gash on Blaire's shoulder.

'Distracting her from the wound should be the best, right?' Michael asked himself. He never had to take care of a severely injured patient who was bleeding to death before. However, the biggest problem was not distracting Blaire but tending to her wound. If they had a healing potion or an Artifact with a healing enchantment, they wouldn't have an issue healing Blaire. Unfortunately, they had nothing.

"So, you brought me lizard eggs?" Michael asked while pointing at the three yellow rugby ball-shaped eggs – or what he presumed to be eggs. 'Did she get injured in the lizard cave when she stole them?'

"You have good eyes, my lord. They're eggs, but not the eggs of lizards!" Blaire said proudly. The corners of her lips curled upward.

"Not lizard's eggs? Then what..." Michael began to ponder while Blaire's smile widened further.

"These are the eggs of a Bilrox!! These Gorilla-like humans attacked me when they noticed that I stole their Bilrox's eggs, but I was faster and slyer than them. I escaped with three Bilrox eggs, though I got a little injured. Isn't that great?!" She chuckled lightly while giving him a thumbs up.

However, Michael didn't feel the slightest bit happy. Blaire had just provoked an unknown Lord to steal just a few Bilrox eggs. Her mission had been to explore the surrounding area, not to make enemies and receive a lethal wound from acting recklessly.

'This dumb idiot!' He shouted in his mind while maintaining a poker face on the outside. Shouting at Blaire right now wouldn't help anyone.

It was already a good thing that Blaire survived, and it wasn't a terrible thing to have Bilrox eggs. Heran, the Lesser Tamer, could hatch and raise the Bilrox, and they could create their own horde eventually. That was a good thing.

Bilrox were a rare kind of bird that had been announced as extinct, only to resurface in some corners of the Origin Expanse every now and then. They had a cute and charming appearance that combined the features of a bird and a mammal. Their feathers were yellow in color but they had special properties which made them quite valuable. They had a distinct appearance with a plump, round bodies and long, slender legs, and wings that were too small to allow them to fly.

Due to their gentle temperament, they were often captured and used as mounts to travel around and breed to harvest as many feathers as possible.

Adding all of this information, Michael understood why Blaire stole the Bilrox eggs. She wanted to help her Lord in the expansion of his territory, and Bilrox were a reliable source of income and means of transport. If he wanted to sell the eggs, Michael could make much more than he did during the last few days combined.

The problem was just that Michael had a bad feeling about the 'Gorilla-like human' Lord. If his guess was correct, the situation in his territory would soon change, for the worse.

'Gorilla-like humans, strong physically, but dense...that could be Gogis,' Michael presumed, and his expression worsened at the thought, 'If it's really Gogis, they will not stop until they find and kill Blaire and take back the eggs where they belong!'

Gogis were one of the most vengeful races Michael had heard about. They were not the smartest and were a bit narrow-minded but their resilience, determination, and stubbornness to finish what they started making up for those flaws.

Unfortunately, that also meant the Gogis would hunt down Blaire, and her Lord, thinking that she had been ordered to steal the Bilrox eggs.

'What a mess...what a mess...'

Chapter 25 Return

Michael had been focused on extracting resources all day.

He didn't go hunting because he was also organizing his War Rune's storage space, and getting familiar to his subjects, hoping that they would learn to trust him. After all, he had to make sure that his subjects knew that he would return to the Origin Expanse once he returned home.

The biggest issue at hand was the Gogi Lord and his military force. If the gorilla-like humans Blaire was talking about were actually Gogis it was highly likely that they would attack his territory once they found it. Because of that, Michael felt obliged to tell his subjects that he would leave the Origin Expanse to purchase everything needed.

There shouldn't be any issues with him leaving because the protection barrier would continue to protect his territory from invaders and predators.

"Of course, you must leave, Master. Blaire will die without a healer or some medicine, so please don't worry about us," Williams Hearts, the Apprentice Architect said while clenching his fist, "We will be fine!"

It was the evening of Michael's third day inside the Origin Expanse and everyone had gathered to have dinner. Michael joined them at the dinner table to tell everyone what he planned to do. That way, nobody would panic and think that their Lord had abandoned them when the Gogis would attack them, and their Lord disappeared.

Williams was right; however, nobody could smile upon recalling what happened to Blaire only a few hours ago. The Tracker had returned from her exploration mission only a few hours ago. She got severely injured, and her wound had to be tended to. But since they lacked the necessary means to tend her normally, Tiara heated up the blade of the silver spear to burn her wound and disinfect it until she stopped bleeding.

Blaire's screams rang through the entire territory for several minutes until she could not take it anymore and fainted due to the pain.

It was horrifying.

Everyone felt sorry for Blaire, and they wanted to help her recuperate fast. However, nobody was well versed in the plants inside the rainforest. This made it impossible to find herbs and plants with healing properties.

Thus, Michael would have to take care of it by leaving the territory for a while.

"The eggs are fertilized, and it won't take long before the Bilrox chicken will hatch. No more than three days, if my appraisal is correct," Heran, the Lesser Tamer, said, trying to change the topic.

Blaire's screams had been unbearable to listen to, and he didn't want to be kept reminded about it.

"That's great. Fortunately, we don't have to pay too much attention to their diet since they're omnivores," Michael responded absent-mindedly.

He was still a little bothered that Blaire had ensured that he would never be able to befriend the Gogis near their territory. The chance would have been low, knowing that the Gogis were not an easy race to

deal with, but Blaire had simply sealed off the minor opportunity even before it appeared, in the first place.

'Even their weakest is Tier-1, and their numbers are higher as well, while I'm just a new Lord in the territory. Sounds pleasant...like seriously...' He grumbled to himself before his focus reverted to the campfire and his company.

Michael knew that he wouldn't be able to sleep tonight, so he might as well prepare a few plans for tomorrow while continuing to talk with his subjects.

Hours passed in the blink of an eye, and it was already pitch-black outside. The familiar sounds of the rainforest such as the rustling of leaves and wild beast noises reached everyone, but no one paid them any attention. Tiara and the others stared at Michael's War Rune. The War Rune flickered a few times and Michael got up from his place instinctively.

"I think I can leave now," He said with a faint smile on his lips before he willed the Runic Gate to open.

The space to Michael's left distorted, creating a bright light, and a white, unblemished Gate materialized no sooner.

'They will be fine, right?' He hesitated a moment but reaffirmed his determination by locking eyes with Tiara. Her eyes glimmered in determination, so why was he the one who hesitated? He was their Lord, the man who was supposed to give his subjects a better, more fulfilling, and prosperous life!

"I will be back soon!" Michael declared, clenching his fists before he stepped through the Gate.

He disappeared a moment later, and the Runic Gate followed suit. It dispersed as if it never existed.

Tiara's ears drooped the next moment. She stared at the disappearing Runic Gate then at her own War Rune before she mumbled in a muffled voice.

"I hope he won't face any problems."

Michael's mind was so focused on the execution of the plans he had come up with beforehand that he didn't even notice when he reappeared at home.

He emerged back in the kitchen where he manifested the Runic Gate before himself.

"Everything looks the same..." Michael mumbled, "...but why does it feel so different?"

He felt a bit odd while returning to the concrete jungle, but it was not exactly a bad feeling. Michael was excited and looking forward to spending his time in the Origin Expanse and back in mankind's territory. It made him feel as if he lived two separate lives that were as contrasting as possible.

'I understand you know, Danny,' Michael thought as he opened the holographic screen of his crystal watch.

The crystal watch disappeared when he entered the Origin Expanse but it reappeared as if it had never left his wrist the moment he stepped out of the gate. Michael didn't bother paying any attention to it either.

"It's Wednesday 13:15 pm, and I entered the Origin Expanse...Tuesday at 3 am," He mumbled, "So, only 34 hours passed since I entered the Origin Expanse. The time ratio is really 2:1, nice. I have no time to waste!"

Michael had a lot to do and every minute at home was equivalent to two minutes in the Origin Expanse, so he rushed into the bathroom while booking a shuttle. He jumped in the shower, scrubbed himself nicely, and threw his old clothes away. They were torn in several spots and smudged with dried monster blood, dirt, and sweat.

Once he was done, Michael put on a basic combat suit and a second layer of comfortable clothes on top. Afterward, he left the apartment in a rush. The shuttle was already waiting for him and Michael entered it.

"To the Central Trading Hall, please!" Michael said before pressing the crystal watch against the screen that popped up in front of him. The emotionless voice of the shuttle's AI resounded a moment later.

[Of course, Sir!]

The shuttle set off and flew through the airspace of the capital for the next 20 minutes.

In the meantime, Michael spent his time focusing on the crystal watch's messenger. His brother wasn't at home, so Michael sent him a simple message.

[Michael: Hey Danny, I'm doing fine. I am not injured and just wanted to tell you that there is no need for you to worry about me. My territory is much better than yours! :P]

Michael was pretty sure that there was no need for him to tell his brother that this territory was a big mess. It would worry Danny needlessly when his brother was already busy with his own territory.

"Oh?" He noticed that a new chat had popped up on the messenger and opened the chat without thinking too much about it.

[Alice Zenovia(fierce beauty): If you're alive, send me a message.]

[Alice Zenovia(fierce beauty): The Sapphirelake Military Academy's aptitude examination will be held on the 20th. I applied on your behalf, but you don't have to come if you don't want to. But just so you know – This year is the first time that applications across mankind's territory will be accepted. Before, the Military Academy handpicked their students, but this is the first time they are inviting a larger pool and graduates can apply on their own as well. That means you could be the first student from an ordinary background to reap the Military academy's benefits.]

These two messages were followed up with an attached file containing the exact time and place of the test, in addition to detailed notes about the range of tests, and the score one needed to get accepted.

However, Michael put the file aside after he downloaded it. He was a little bit interested in the Military Academy, but there were other things he had to deal with first.

"So talkative..."

After he finished reading Alice's chat, he didn't answer immediately. He looked up the prices of items and which clerk he should visit in the Central Trading Hall to make the most use of the resources he had collected within his first three days inside the Origin Expanse.

Meanwhile, the shuttle reached its destination.

[Thank you for using Golden Lion's shuttle service!]

Michael was pulled out of his train of thought upon hearing the emotionless voice. He got up and left the shuttle with a last glance at his chat with Alice Zenovia. Without thinking too much, he typed something before he closed the chat.

His message was simple enough to tell her that he was still alive.

'That should be enough.'

[Michael: –]

Chapter 26 House Of Witchery

It was almost 2 pm when Michael reached the plaza of the Central Trading Hall.

The plaza was a large and grandiose square, which was surrounded by the U-shaped Central Trading Hall. A huge water fountain, surrounded by stone statues of humanity's heroes, adorned the center of the plaza. However, Michael didn't pay much attention to it. He approached the map and used the searching function.

'Bartholomew's House of Witchery', he typed, and a detailed route appeared in front of him. Michael pressed the crystal watch against the map's information transfer symbol and left afterward.

The crystal watch now had the route to Bartholomew's House of Witchery and guided him through the humongous plaza and even the larger Central Trading Hall.

Despite being called a Trading Hall, it was easier to compare it to a shopping mall with 20 floors in total. It was also possible to sell goods here, which was why Michael chose the Central Trading Hall as his destination.

Entering the Central Trading Hall was pretty easy. Every entrance had certain channels one had to pass to be allowed to enter. Awakened with a War Rune would have their War Rune scanned while ordinary people's irises and fingerprints would be scanned and compared with their ID for verification. All of this was a precautionary measure since too many incidents had occurred since the Central Trading Hall had been built.

When it was Michael's turn, he showed the Guard his War Rune and waited for it to be scanned. However, the Guard didn't step forward immediately. He looked at Michael for a second or two before he moved to scan his War Rune.

"I hope you don't take offense at what I am going to say, Sir, but I recommend you register as a Lord. The government will provide higher access permission to certain information if you have a Lord ID, and more benefits will be provided as well," The Guard advised with a subtle smile on his face.

Michael was stunned for a moment, but he nodded his head. He recalled that the War Rune of a Lord had a stronger presence than that of an Adventurer. This made it easier for others to sense when they're in the presence of a Lord, and how strong that Lord is.

Of course, Michael seemed young, and he didn't have a lofty air around him, but it was always better to be careful, especially as ordinary guards.

The other guards looked at their colleague with a little astonishment, but they didn't say anything.

"Thank you. I will do that!" Michael said and he made a mental note to register at the government when he wasn't in such a rush anymore.

Once his War Rune was scanned, Michael could enter the Central Trading Hall. He followed the guidance of the crystal watch and went looking for Bartholomew's House of Witchery.

Meanwhile, the other Guards rushed to their colleague.

"Why did you speak to that kid? You know that some of those kids can be extremely troublesome, so why did you give him unsolicited advice?" One of them asked in a husky voice while the other jumped ahead, shaking his colleague as if to wake him up from a dream.

"Did you already forget what happened to Sh—..."

"I know," The guard, who had talked to Michael before, replied, "I don't know why I did that either. He seemed kind and was wearing clothes from an ordinary brand, so I figured that he became an Awakened not too long ago."

He gave it a shrug, and didn't bother with the discussion anymore, "He thanked me for the advice, so everything is fine, isn't it?!"

In the meantime, Michael found himself on the 14th floor, standing in front of a large shop titled Bartholomew's House of Witchery.

"It's not exotic, at all. Isn't it just a normal store?"

Michael expected the House of Witchery to be a small store that was filled with the smell of herbs and grotesque-looking items from the Origin Expanse. However, he was pleasantly surprised to find it to be the exact opposite. The store was meticulously organized, clean, and faint citrus aroma wafted through the air.

All kinds of Artifacts were exhibited in the main aisle of the store, and miscellaneous items could be found on his right side. Various potions and various resources entered his view as well upon taking a proper look. Overall, it was easy to understand the set-up of the shop.

"Selling items and Monsters can be done...here!" Michael mumbled and looked around a bit until he found a clerk standing behind a wooden counter. A wooden sign saying [Witchery Bazaar] attracted his attention, and he approached it.

The clerk noticed Michael's arrival in his store and bowed lightly.

"Welcome to the Witchery Bazaar. How may I help you?" He asked politely.

"I want to sell a few Monster Cores, flasks of blood, neatly preserved organs of rare monsters, Gemstones, and such," Michael said straightforwardly. The clerk took a quick glance at Michael's clothes and War Rune before he nodded his head.

"Please follow me, Sir. I will lead you to the appraisal room!" He said, sounding just as polite as before. However, his demeanor had now changed a little. The clerk didn't seem to think too highly of him.

'I am not wasting your time, buddy. Calm down, and let's get this done without wasting our time, okay?' Michael wanted to say but he remained silent to prevent inviting unnecessary trouble. He was not in the mood to play around. A more skilled and veteran Lord was probably on his way to attack his territory!

The appraisal room was a room attached to the House of Witchery. It was used to retrieve the goods from the War Rune to have them appraised, and to make sure that the trade would remain anonymous. At the same time, it also ensured that the smell of monster corpses and unique – smelly – goods wouldn't permeate the air of the House of Witchery.

The room didn't look anything special. If Michael had to compare it to something, the closest was probably the operation room in the hospital which was equipped with advanced technology that could measure and appraise the goods at hand.

"Please retrieve the items you want to sell. I will appraise them and provide a satisfactory price, I promise!" The clerk said with an obvious fake smile on his face.

'Did you wake up on the wrong side of the bed or what?' Michael asked himself but he simply complied. He began to retrieve the goods he had neatly stuffed inside his War Rune, filling it to the brim.

Monster Cores and Gemstones filled the table, followed by antlers, wolf claws and near-perfectly dissected fur, leather, tendons, muscles, internal organs, bones, dozens of flasks filled with triple extracted blood to purify it further, and more.

Even if his War Rune's spatial storage could only carry two Low Tier-1 Monster corpses, it was big enough for a self-proclaimed world-class Tetris player to squeeze all the puzzle pieces inside it. Michael had spent a while fitting and storing everything he wanted to sell without damaging it, but it worked, at last.

He watched the clerk's expression change with a satisfied smile before pointing out the most important fact, "If you want to maintain the quality of the highly potent Tier-1 Monster blood and their organs, I recommend you preserve them. Damages that occur in the appraisal room are the responsibility of the shop, or so I heard."

The last few words intended to take a jab at the clerk and pressure him. It worked perfectly as the clerk panicked for a moment before he pressed the cooling button to decrease the temperature in the room drastically. After that, the clerk had to act quickly to make sure that no good was damaged. He didn't want his monthly report card to be tarnished with a de-merit, after all!

Michael didn't say anything else. He just watched the clerk and opened the crystal watch to research the price of potions and other goods.

There was no need to worry about getting cheated by the House of Witchery, or any other shop in the Central Trading Hall. The moment they caused trouble their lease would be retracted, and their contract terminated.

Losing one of the best spots in the most popular Trading Hall on the planet was not something any shop owner would want to happen. After all, the money they made in a month in this spot was equivalent to the bi-annual income of shop owners in other popular spots!

Less than half an hour later, the clerk was done. Despite the frigid air in the room, he was sweating buckets. He glanced at Michael every now and then, just to end up cursing himself inwardly.

How could he mess up that badly?

"I am done...Sir," He said before weakly adding, "I am sorry for my attitude earlier. I had a big fight with my girlfriend..."

Michael chuckled lightly upon hearing the clerk's measly excuse but he went along.

"I hope that the satisfying price you promised me was not a lie," He replied, and the clerk nodded his head vigorously.

"Of course, Sir! You will love the price!"

After a quick chat, they left the appraisal room. The details of the House of Wichery's purchase would take a minute or two, but that was already it. Once he signed the deal, he would earn a small fortune, which would be used up to expand his territory and nourish his subjects!

However, before Michael and the clerk could finish the deal, they heard a loud voice.

"You bastard! Do you not love me anymore?!?" A young woman shouted in a shrill voice. Her voice echoed through the entire shop, followed by the voice of an equally young man who retorted in annoyance,

"Not buying you the Artifact doesn't mean I don't love you anymore! Get your facts straight, honey!"

What the hell was going on there?

Chapter 27 Barbaric Couple

A young couple, roughly Michael's age, was throwing a tantrum in the middle of Bartholomew's House of Witchery.

Michael didn't pay them much attention because it was not the first time that he had seen a lover's spat. This young couple was extremely loud but that was already it.

Thus, Michael followed the Clerk to complete the official paperwork and get his money's worth at the counter of the Witchery Bazaar.

"Ay, shit..." The clerk cursed after he spent two minutes on the Witchery Bazaar's holographic screen. He looked apologetically at Michael and said, "We will have to go to the main counter to complete the deal."

I forgot to open the bank transfer payment gateway in the Witchery Bazaar this morning...it would take a few minutes to unlock all safety measurements..."

'Maybe he really fought with his girlfriend. He looks like a mess, that's for sure,' Michael thought with a shrug before he motioned the clerk to proceed in the direction of the main counter.

Some of the staff members were at the counter, doing some work while glancing at the quarreling couple every few seconds.

"I really don't understand them. No, I understand their families even less," One of them, a young woman with a ponytail, said quietly to the other, "Why would the Kolbenheim family and Orlando family engage them with each other if they're always this violent?"

"I really don't know. The Barbaric Couple is always fighting. I think I've never heard any good news about that couple, and that's quite weird since they have decent talent and look quite good together. One would think that a few articles mention their good looks and talent, but there is not a single one!" Another female staff with a bob cut replied.

"I think there were a few articles, but Frederik would make sure that he fired every man who wrote articles about Jacqueline, while Jacqueline would do the same when women wrote articles about Frederik. Hundreds of reporters were fired. It was a big mess!" Ponytail added, sighing deeply.

Michael didn't want to listen to their gossiping but that was almost impossible. Their voices were loud enough for everyone around to hear, including Michael.

'So a couple like that exists as well? Violent and overflowing with jealousy? Well, you can consider that passionate love if you twist the definition a little bit...well, quite a lot.' He thought as he was forced to listen to both the gossiping staff and the lover's quarrel.

The clerk who appraised his goods earlier wanted to provide Michael with a good customer experience to make sure that the young Lord would return the next time he had something to sell, but his co-workers were not really helpful in this regard.

His co-workers kept acting as if they were engrossed in their work, only for their focus to revert to the lover's quarrel. It looked like the Barbaric couple would wreak havoc soon enough, and they didn't want to miss that.

Michael frowned but he didn't say anything. He was in a rush but throwing a tantrum wouldn't help either. The Barbaric couple's quarreling reached a stage where the people around them had to be careful.

'Ugh...when did they unsheathe their weapons?!' Michael nearly shouted out loud with a raised eyebrow.

Both Frederik Kolbenheim, and Jacqueline Orlando were Awakened, and it looked like they wanted to turn the House of Witchery into a battlefield. Jacqueline was a young woman with long red hair. Her cheeks were puffed up and red just like her hair right now.

It didn't take a brainiac to determine that she was boiling in anger, ready to slice Frederik into countless pieces.

However, that didn't seem to bother Frederik. His azure eyes glimmered in anger even though his fair skin didn't change color even once. He didn't turn red, but his facial expression spoke volumes about the emotions that were slowly beginning to engulf his entire being.

'At least, they're not powerful Awakened. Good thing that they're around my age. The shop will survive,' Michael thought as he activated Eagle Eyes to take a closer look at their War Rune and movements.

Even if this was a lover's quarrel, they seemed ready to fight it out in real combat. That was a little weird, but Michael could make use of it to observe the descendants of powerful families up close. After all, the coalition between the Orlando family and the Kolbenheims resulted in the creation of a low-ranked Kingdom. They shouldn't be underestimated.

"Why are you like this?? Can't you be more reasonable?!?" Jacqueline shouted angrily while brandishing her fencing blade in front of her.

"Do you even know what you're talking about, Jacq? You look like a maniac right now!" Frederik shouted back, pointing his longsword at her.

"Looks like it's impossible to talk to you..." Jacqueline replied, flicking her long hair back before she changed her stance, "Darling, I think it's time to beat some sense into you. I cannot go on like this!"

'What?'

Frederik chuckled lightly for a second before he also entered a combat stance, "It's like you're speaking my mind. Since I cannot reason with you, I shall leave father-in-law and teach you a lesson in his place instead!"

Just like that, a fight burst out in the middle of Bartholomew's House of Witchery.

The Barbaric Couple dashed toward each other with extreme speed. No hesitation could be seen as their blades collided. Jacqueline was nimble and thrust the fencing blade forward with a horrifyingly fast acceleration. The tip of the fencing blade hit the flat side of Frederik's longsword, altering the sword thrust's trajectory.

Jacqueline followed up by twisting her body to retract the fencing blade and gain enough momentum to thrust out once again.

Her second attack was not as fast and strong as the first, but it followed in quick succession to the first attack. Frederik was not fast enough to block the attack. His reaction speed was too slow, which was also why he ended up with the fencing blade's tip in his side.

Jacqueline controlled her power precisely. She pierced out and retracted the blade the moment it drilled into her lover's flesh. Only a few blood droplets trickled to the ground before the scratch stopped bleeding.

'If that's love I rather die at old age, alone,' Michae thought as he watched the couple's fight. His Eagle Eyes Soultrait was not even required to follow their movements, but it was easier to see minute details in their movements. That was also how Michael determined that Jacqueline's War Rune had a higher

degree of refinement. She was a little bit stronger and faster than Frederik even though their Artifacts were likely to enhance them equally.

Michael had yet to see their Soultraits, but his interest was picked. Unfortunately, the couple's fight seemed to escalate a little after the young man's blood had been shed. His movements got sharper at once and his spatial awareness allowed him to balance out the lower refinement degree of his War Rune.

The sound of metal colliding resounded and everyone in the shop was now paying attention to them. No Soultrait had been unleashed yet, but the fierceness of the battle was dangerous, nonetheless.

'If they keep going like that, they will kill each other... or injure oth—....'

Michael's mind blanked out before he could finish his thought. His attention was pulled over to a kid that was racing through the aisles.

The young boy passed by everyone as if he was playing on a hardcore course of a racing game, just to head straight to the hell difficulty...straight to the chaotic battlefield of the barbaric couple.

'Kid, are you insane?!' Michael first thought before he looked around, 'Where the hell are mothers when their kids act suicidal?!?'

At that moment, Frederik evaded one of Jacqueline's thrusts before slapping her on the butt with the flat side of his longsword. He wanted to humiliate her, but instead pushed her ahead with too much force.

Jacqueline lost balance and ran straight into the oblivious boy, her eyes widened in shock.

"Well, shit..."

Chapter 28 Instinct

Michael was the first to realize that something had gone terribly wrong. His Eagle Eyes Soultrait was fully unleashed, providing him with more details than anyone else in the shop could decipher.

He tensed up the moment the little boy raced past them, but his tingling senses went awry the moment Frederik slapped his fiancé's butt jokingly. As a result, Jacqueline lost her balance. She tripped over her feet and stumbled forward, unable to regain balance at once.

The fencing blade was still stretched out from the thrust she had meant to issue at her fiancé but her target had involuntarily changed to the little boy. The boy was still oblivious to the lethal threat he was about to face even though the fencing blade's tip pointed right at him.

The distance between the fencing blade and the little boy decreased rapidly, and it was only when they were dangerously close to each other that screams of terror resounded in the House of Witchery.

Everyone's eyes grew wide with shock and they vividly imagined the worst possible outcome as they watched the terrifying scene unfolding in front of them with wide-open mouths.

Even though they wanted to help, they knew that they couldn't do anything. They were not Awakened, and unable to block a high-quality Artifact's razor-sharp blade with their bare hands. Had they been Awakened they might have been able to act but they were unlikely to reach the young boy before it was already too late.

And even if they reached the boy in time, how were they supposed to protect their own life? Artifacts were extremely expensive, and the descendant of the Orlando family was bound to possess a high-quality Artifact!!

As the screams of the people in the shop resounded, a young man made his move. His body acted instinctively the moment he detected that Jacqueline tripped over her own foot. He dashed forward by releasing every bit of strength in his body.

Tigerfang manifested in Michael's hand the moment he made a move, but his expression turned grim soon after.

'I won't make it.'

He could instinctively tell that he was not fast enough. Jacqueline and the little boy were too close, and he would have to cross almost ten meters in the next second to make it.

'Shit...what now?' He thought but his body had already reacted. Fenrir's memories resurfaced in Michael's mind unexpectedly. Memories of Fenrir's experience and tireless training as an Archer and Spearman came to his aid. Michael felt like he had experienced Fenrir's arduous training himself and his body moved as if it was familiar with everything it was going to do.

However, it was not Michael's muscle memories that allowed him to create a solution, but the memories that were deeply imprinted in his mind.

'Spear throwing shouldn't be too hard with those memories...so...how about a sword?!' Michael wondered the moment he changed his stance to maximize his momentum.

A moment later, the muscles in his right arm bulged and his veins protruded out of his skin, looking like they were about to burst at any moment as he swung his arm forward with full force, releasing the thin longsword.

Tigerfang shot through the air with shocking velocity. It crossed ten meters at once and brushed past the little boy's head, narrowly missing him. The next moment the jarring sound of metal colliding against metal rang out.

Michael paid no attention to Jacqueline or Tigerfang anymore. His focus had diverted to the little boy the moment he threw Tigerfang at the young Awakened. His speed never decreased, and he reached the young boy a second later. Michael's arms coiled around the little boy just to throw himself to one side as he heard something breaking.

Metal shards flew through the surrounding as if a shrapnel grenade had detonated, but Michael didn't pay any attention. He shielded the boy with his body, trying to take the brunt of the attack and letting the metal fragments hit his body.

However, even after a few seconds passed, Michael was not able to feel anything. Not a single metal fragment pierced his back, or any other part of his body.

'None hit me?' He wondered as he slowly got up from the ground. Then he saw the metal fragments lying on the ground right next to a red-haired girl whose eyes widened in shock.

Jacqueline stared blankly at the metal fragments and the thin longsword that lay unmoving amid it.

"Hmm? I thought Tigerfang shattered..." Michael mumbled before he retrieved Tigerfang with his will. The thin longsword turned into a white wisp that shot back inside his War Rune.

At the same time, the little boy began to cry out loud. He buried his head in Michael's broad chest and clung to him after realizing what had just happened.

"Don't cry, everything is fine now," Michael said in a soothing voice while gently caressing the little boy's head.

The little boy stopped crying and it was only then that the mother arrived. She screamed and shouted at the boy before apologizing to Michael several times. She thanked him profusely, but Michael wasn't buying it.

'Had you paid more attention to your kid, I wouldn't have had to face these maniacs, you know?!' He wanted to say, but he let it be. All that mattered was that the little boy was fine.

Maybe the incident would teach him not to run around mindlessly. That's what Michael hoped for.

After the little boy was dragged away by his mother – who had been too late for the party – Michael was the only one left in the same aisle as Jacqueline and Frederik.

Frederik was standing a few meters further away, but Jacqueline fell to the ground next to Michael with a helpless look. She stared blankly at the metal fragments, which had once been her fencing blade, and a tear trickled down her cheek.

"M-my Artifact..." She stammered before starting to sob miserably.

'Is that your biggest problem, right now? Seriously?!' Michael wondered, having a hard time not staring at her as if she had lost her sanity because he was pretty sure that this girl was even crazier than the fierce beauty.

"How dare you attack my girl?!?" Frederik snapped after he regained his senses. He stepped forward while clenching his longsword tightly.

"Fighting is prohibited in the Central Trading Hall, you know that, right?" Michael retorted sharply.

"...so what?" Frederik responded, glaring at Michael in response.

Frederik slowed down and his gaze was involuntarily drawn to the shattered remains of Jacqueline's Tierless 4-Star Artifact. Shattering it was not easy, but a single throw of that young man's Sword Artifact had been enough to break it apart.

"I don't care about your lover's spat, but you nearly killed an innocent boy because of your fight. Even your families won't be able to help you if she would have killed that boy. You two would have gotten banned from the Central Trading Hall, and worse...you would have killed someone innocent, a little boy..." Michael had to summon every bit of mental strength to keep his calm, but it looked like Frederik Kolbenheim didn't really care.

Frederik's glare made it seem as if he asked, 'Do you think anyone can ban me from anywhere? Do you even know who I am?'. It was almost like Frederik didn't consider that little boy, or anyone else, as human beings. This type of response made Michael recall his high school days and the unreasonably lofty attitude of most classmates, and it fueled his anger.

"Are you not ashamed of yourself?"

"Ashamed? Me?! Do you even know who I—" Frederik began, his cheeks red in anger, and his sword pointed at Michael.

"I really don't give a shit who you are. Just don't disturb others and play your games at home in the bedroom," Michael retorted, not allowing Frederik to finish his cliché line, "You can kill each other while fooling around in your bed, I don't mind."

Michael knew that he had gone too far, but he didn't really care at this moment.

However, Frederik was of a different opinion. He cared a lot about his public image, and he would never allow anyone to insult him like this.

So he unleashed his Soultrait.

A moment later, the scene in the House of Witchery changed drastically.

"Die, you bastard!!"

...

'Is that idiot the incarnation of idiocy and clichés?'

Chapter 29 Head Butler

Frederik unleashed his Soultrait in a fit of rage.

He used his energy to create gusts of wind with a faint azure hue engulfing them. The gusts were compressed into crescent-shaped blades, which were released a moment later.

The wind blades blasted at Michael with a terrific velocity, but he didn't panic. Tigerfang reappeared in his right hand, and his Eagle Eyes Soultrait was still fully activated, enhancing his sight and reflexes.

'Is that bastard insane?' Michael wondered as he slashed at the wind blades that were about to cut into his body. His movements were fluid and nimble as he cut through three wind blades while evading the rest.

A deep frown formed on his face, but he didn't say anything. It was clear that the Barbaric couple was not to be reasoned with. They fought in the middle of a bustling shop in the Central Trading Hall and had nearly killed a young innocent boy. It was only obvious that Michael wouldn't lower his guard against such a crazy couple.

He took a few steps back and glanced over to Jacqueline, who was still sitting on the ground. Tears were streaming down her cheeks like a waterfall as she reached out for the remains of her fencing blade and held them close.

'People say that opposite attracts...but that's not the case right here. They're like two mad lads birthed from the same egg...'

"Stop evading my attacks and face them head-on!!" Frederik shouted in anger as he created a new batch of wind blades.

He released them while dashing forward as well.

The attack trajectory of the wind blades was pretty simple thanks to Jacqueline being in the way and the shelves left and right to the aisle. Michael's enhanced strength and perception also provided him with a drastic advantage. They allowed him to stay focused on Frederik when he leaned forward and kicked off to blast his body ahead.

His sword-arm swung out like a snake lunging at its prey. Tigerfang cut easily through four wind blades before Michael changed the sword's trajectory in an instant. He twisted Tigerfang and pushed himself to the side while halting his advance at once. The sound his ankles made when he halted his advance suddenly was sickening to hear but Michael ignored it.

He used his superior speed and perception to use Tigerfang like a bat. Its flat side shot past Frederik's longsword and impacted with tremendous force. The impact surface was Frederik's stomach, and the result was even better than Michael would have expected.

'Looks like their families aren't mindlessly feeding them with resources to grow stronger,' Michael concluded as Frederik collapsed on the ground.

Frederik clutched his stomach in pain while trying desperately to breathe.

Michael simply looked at the young man as he analyzed his strength and perception.

'Thanks to my Soultrait I was able to get a glimpse of his movement much earlier than I should. That, combined with my superior strength and agility, gave me the opportunity to strike.'

Michael knew that Frederik didn't use his entire strength to attack him because he never considered this short encounter a life-and-death battle. However, it was still quite surprising to think that Frederik's raw strength was lower than his.

This could only mean two things; Michael's War Rune was refined to a higher degree, or Tigerfang enhanced his strength and agility higher than the Artifacts Frederik bound to his War Rune!

Either way, Michael was at an advantage.

"How about we stop now?" He asked.

His gaze continued to linger on Frederik but there didn't seem to be any more danger coming from the young man.

Frederik looked up to see Michael towering above him a few meters away. The cold abyss-like eyes of the unknown young man caused shivers to run down his spine and he nodded his head faintly before he even realized.

'Who is that guy? Why does it feel like I'm being ridiculed by my instructor?' Frederik thought, having a tough time comprehending why Michael's fighting style and actions made it feel like he was fighting a veteran just a moment ago.

What Frederik didn't know was that Michael was also a little surprised by his own actions. His body moved before he realized, and the reason was pretty simple- Fenrir's memories!

'I will need more time to digest Fenrir's memory fragments and sort out the things I do not want to recall,' He thought in all seriousness, 'I do not want his memories to affect me negatively, but exploiting his combat experience and knowledge will help me a lot...'

While he was deep in thought, Michael ignored that Frederik had already gotten up from the ground. One of his hands was pressed against his aching stomach while his longsword rested in his other hand.

"I am the third son of the Kolbenheim family, Frederik Kolbenheim. I have a 3-Star Soultrait, and I entered the Origin Expanse a month ago. Introduce yourself please..." He was about to finish the last sentence but stopped midway as he recalled Michael's fluidic and lethal movements.

"Is he asking me for a date or what?" Michael asked in an incredulous tone before he added quietly, "What an idiot."

Frederik heard Michael's last words and scowled. Instinctively, he conjured several wind spears using his Soultrait, but Michael just smiled. He pointed somewhere behind Frederik with a small smile.

"Looks like your babysitter found you."

Frederik turned his head, and his movements froze upon seeing a gray-haired man standing right behind him. He wore simple, yet striking clothes which most butlers wore on duty, but that didn't hide the overwhelming power residing inside the old man's body.

"Head butler La—..."

"We're leaving. Come with me, or you'll be carried out like your little fiancé," The head butler instructed, while his gaze moved to Jacqueline, whom he had already picked up. He threw her on his shoulder like a bag of potatoes and ignored that she was throwing a tantrum, trying to escape the head butler's clutches.

Michael didn't expect a butler to be a powerful Awakened, but it made sense. Some families hired retired Awakened as both butlers and bodyguards to make sure that their children would be safe from most dangers. Nonetheless, Michael wondered how strong the old man in front of him was. Thus, he did something he didn't initially want to do. He decided to rile up Frederik for being a douchebag.

"I have a 2-Star Soultrait and it has been less than two days since my War Rune formed. Looks like you have to train a lot when you're back home, Frederik Kolbenheim with a 3-Star Soultrait," Michael muttered in a low mocking voice, but he was loud enough for Frederik to hear.

The young man's head flicked around at once, just to see the mocking expression on Michael's face. Frederik grit his teeth and clenched his fists, however, he didn't say a word.

Instead, it was the head butler who halted in his tracks. He scanned Michael from head to toe before his gaze returned back to the War Rune on the back of Michael's hand.

His gaze rested on the War Rune for a second or two until the head butler bowed to Michael.

"I apologize for the trouble my master and his fiancé caused," The head butler apologized, "They have a bad temper, Lord..."

'You want me to tell you my name? Sorry to disappoint you, but there is not much to find.' Michael chuckled in his mind.

"I am just an ordinary guy, who got a bit lucky. There is no need to waste your time on me," Michael replied nonchalantly.

He was still a little bit angry about the Barbaric Couple's attitude and actions, but it was not like the head butler was at fault for their stupidity.

Michael was way too familiar with spoiled and entitled children of big families, in the first place. Thus, he might have gone a little overboard to teach them a lesson since he was itching to change his life by becoming a strong Lord who could stand up for himself after his War Rune manifested.

"I see." The head butler looked at Michael for a few more seconds before he nodded his head.

"In that case, I hope you will continue to stay lucky, Sir."

Chapter 30 Hardship Of Being A Father

After the Barbaric couple was dragged outside Bartholomew's House of Witchery, Michael was finally able to conclude the deal and get his money.

Meanwhile, in a private room in one of the most popular restaurants of the Central Trading Hall, two middle-aged men clinked glasses.

"Don't you think it's a good sign that we're finally able to create a formal bond between our families? Our families have been working together for a long time, but we were never able to form an even stronger bond. It's a good thing that this will change with Frederik and your lovely daughter," One of the middle-aged men said after he took a sip of the liquor.

"Lovely? She is wild, and I don't think anyone can control her..." The other middle-aged man responded before he downed the entire glass of liquor at once, "I really hope that Frederik can control Jacqueline in the future... They might have been good friends since childhood, but I've heard too many rumors about them. It worries me a little, to be honest."

The two men were the patriarchs of the Kolbenheim and Orlando family, and also the parents of the troublemakers Frederik and Jacqueline.

"The rumors, you say? I heard that they call Jacqueline and Frederik the Barbaric Couple because they fight everywhere, and because their temper is so bad...looks like we spoiled them too much..." Igor Kolbenheim, Frederik's father, said with regret.

Because they were both Lords of their own territory and the patriarchs of their respective families, they had a lot to do. It was not easy to be a patriarch or a Lord, but they had to juggle both responsibilities simultaneously. Thus, they never had much time to raise their children. Unfortunately, that was also why they ended up spoiling their children whenever they met.

Only now that it was too late did they realize their mistake, but there was not much they could do about it.

"Talking about regrets of the past doesn't resolve the issues at hand. The rumors are bad enough for us to be forced to meet and have your head butler and my information department report to us about everything they did in the past. We're here to come up with the best solutions for them, and our families." Jacqueline's father, Karek Orlando said while patting his old friend's back reassuringly.

It had been a while since they met up to eat and drink. The occasion was not pleasant, but it was still comforting to have each other to rely on. It was easier to have good in-laws to talk to rather than entitled and lofty families that were unwilling to accept their mistakes.

"Let go of me! I said, let go!!!" A loud voice reverberated outside the private room, followed by the sound of breaking plates and shocked squeals from the restaurant guests.

Karek Orlando sighed deeply and set his empty glass down. He reached out for the bottle of alcohol to drown himself in misery, only to halt in his tracks.

"I shouldn't get myself drunk, otherwise..." Karek didn't finish his sentence, but Igor understood. He smiled lightly and put the bottle of alcohol a little bit further away from Karek's reach.

A moment later, the slides of the private room opened, and the head butler entered the room. Jacqueline was still in his arms, hanging down like a wilted flower fluttering in the wind. She was struggling to free herself and thrashed her arms and legs around without caring for her image.

Karek instinctively reached out for the bottle, ignoring his earlier thoughts. He needed alcohol to endure what was about to happen.

Fortunately, Igor had already pushed the bottle beyond his reach while still seated.

The head butler let Jacqueline down, while Frederik entered the room with a grim expression on his pale face.

Jacqueline's face and hair were a mess from all the crying and Frederik seemed to be in pain. He touched his stomach repetitively and flinched every time.

"Huh?" Igor Kolbenheim blurted out, "What happened to you guys?"

Karek Orlando looked at his daughter and future son-in-law for the first time after he heard his friend's question and a deep frown appeared on his face.

He turned to his friend in confusion, but Igor seemed just as confused as him. Their attention switched to the head butler, who bowed deeply in front of the two patriarchs.

"I apologize, Master. I was held up a little and couldn't prevent the young master and young mistress from fighting. They had a little lover's spat and it ended up causing a bit of trouble..." The head butler explained, his head still lowered.

"Jacqueline did that to him? But why is she crying then?" Karek Orlando asked, feeling a little bit uncomfortable about the situation.

Jacqueline took the second question as a sign of breaking out in tears once again.

"Dad...dad...my Silvertite Fencing Saber...someone destroyed it..." Jacqueline said while bawling her eyes out in front of her father.

The patriarchs looked at Jacqueline for a moment, and their gazes flicked to Frederik in unison. However, the young man could only look away while gritting his teeth.

"What happened?" Igor Kolbenheim finally asked the head butler, who opened his mouth just to close it a moment later.

"...it is a little bit hard to explain because I arrived too late, Master..." He started slowly before he added, "But I asked the security team for the footage of the shop's surveillance camera. It should be easier to discern what happened by watching the footage..."

The head butler accessed his crystal watch a moment later and opened the file he had received from the Central Trading Hall's security.

A holographic screen popped up, and the first thing one saw was Bartholomew's House of Witchery and the quarreling couple.

In no time, the lover's little squabble turned into a light fight as they brought out weapons. When the patriarchs saw this, they could only shake their heads in disappointment.

"Why are you guys fighting again, in public at that? Do that at home or in the Arena..." Igor grumbled while Karek added resignedly,

"I've never seen such a weird couple. Why did we even put you two together?"

Upon hearing what her father mumbled, Jacqueline threw herself at Frederik. She ignored his pained groan and squealed while pulling him into an embrace, "Because we love each other!!"

Karek pinched the bridge of his nose, and the thought of getting up and reaching out for the alcohol became more enticing by the second.

Suddenly, the video footage showed the exact moment when Jacqueline tripped and lost her balance. She stumbled and the fencing saber kept getting closer to an oblivious, little boy. Karek tensed and his eyes were glued to the holographic screen as he awaited a horrific scene.

Luckily, a young man appeared out of nowhere and Karek's shoulders relaxed. He frowned a little and questioned himself if it was a great idea to throw the longsword at his daughter, but that thought quickly vanished. Jacqueline's Silvertite Fencing Saber broke the next minute and she slumped to the ground in the video.

"Good thing that someone interfered..." Igor spoke in a relieved voice, and Karek nodded his head. He looked at his daughter sharply and pointed at her, "I will deduct the broken Artifact's worth from your pocket money. If you'd touched even a strand of that little boy, I would have separated you and Frederik!!"

Jacqueline wanted to say something but shut her mouth upon seeing the boiling anger on her father's face and looked down at the ground.

"What...FREDERIK!" Igor shouted suddenly. Frederik flinched and he took a step back involuntarily.

It was the first time he saw his father that angry.

"Why the hell would you attack that man?!? You arrogant idiot!!!" Igor bellowed and his flat hand smashed on the table.

The video showed the short encounter between Frederik and Michael. It ended quickly but that was enough for Karek's expression to change.

"I've noticed it earlier already, but that kid is pretty good. He doesn't seem that old either," He mumbled, "Which family is he from?"

Igor hadn't paid attention to the young man. He only knew that his son had been beaten fairly easily, fortunately. It was a good thing that his son had been taught a lesson after his reckless action.

"Why did you stop there?" Igor noticed that the head butler stopped in the video and looked at the young man for a few seconds.

However, it was not Michael who answered this time. Instead, Frederik's grumbling could be heard from behind them, "That bastard didn't want to tell us his name... he humiliated me and said that he had a weaker Soultrait than me and that he manifested his War Rune less than two days ago..."

"Less than two days? He already has a good Artifact, and his War Rune has been refined quite a bit...I don't remember this youth from the last family gatherings...which family is he from?" Igor Kolbenheim mumbled after a quick scan of the unknown man's strength.

The head butler bowed his head before answering, "I already sent the recording to the information department. They're currently scanning all data to find out who he is. Facial recognition should make it easy to confirm his identity."

The patriarchs nodded their heads in unison upon hearing the head butler's words.

"I think he is either a Shadow of the big families or he is a disciple of the hidden clans," Karek mused as they watched the video for the third time. This time, they ignored their children and focused on the unknown guy, "But in either case, he wouldn't have intercepted in the fight. They're taught to keep their identity hidden under any circumstances."

Igor and the head butler agreed while Jacqueline and Frederik grumbled quietly.

"Who cares about that kid?" Frederik asked while Jacqueline added,

"He destroyed my 4-Star Artifact...just send some of our men to beat the living shit out of him..."

"You two..." Karek warned, clenching his fist, "...I think we've treated both of you too nicely."

Igor agreed readily, nodding his head at once. The video footage was enough to write several articles about the disgrace the new generation brought upon their family. If competitors of the Kolbenheim and Orlando families got wind of their kids' humiliating public act, they would be in a pickle.

Their image would be ruined beyond measure, and so would their goodwill. In turn, the trust people had in them, and their products would go for a toss too.

"I think it's about time to send you there..." Karek said, and Igor agreed without a second thought, "I agree. It's about time for them to face some hardships!"

Little did Frederik and Jacqueline know of the horror that awaited them soon.

Suddenly the discussion of the two patriarchs was intercepted as a holographic screen popped up in front of the head butler. It displayed various pieces of information for everyone in the room to read, attracting their interest.

"Michael Fang...so that's your name..."