

Supreme Lord 231

Chapter 231 Terms and Conditions

231 Terms and Conditions

Seated in a large room with little furniture, Michael exuded a presence of utter calmness.

He took a sip of water and put the glass on the table in front of him, his gaze never leaving the middle-aged man in front of him.

Kilian Whira was sitting opposite Michael, his back drenched and his palms sweaty.

No matter how he looked at it, Michael's demeanor and presence had changed drastically within a few months.

'Was the price I gave for the Artifacts not satisfactory? Should I have indulged him a little bit more? Why is his gaze so scary?!?' Kilian asked himself, knowing that he would never receive an answer to his questions.

He was worried that the Agriculture Project would slow down now that Michael was unwilling to send more blueprints than demanded in his exclusive contract. Slowly realization dawned upon Kilian; the tables had turned.

They lost their advantage.

The higher-ups of the Bartholomew Corporation informed Kilian that Michael Fang had become Alice's direct disciple. That was what the rumors said, and Alice Zenovia didn't deny them – which was something she would have done if the rumors were wrong.

Everyone, who had witnessed the attitude of the Frozen Duchess from previous interviews and interactions with her, knew that she would never accept anyone using her name for publicity stunts and other means. Alice Zenovia allowed only facts about her to circulate in starnet.

That meant she either accepted Michael as a direct disciple, or that she considered herself as Michael's teacher.

The Bartholomew Corporation heard about this not too long ago, and the higher ups were certain that the Frozen Duchess was the one who had influenced Michael to ensure that he wouldn't support the Bartholomew Corporation with more blueprints than requested in the exclusive contract.

They were worried that the Zenovia family might end up convincing Michael that it was better for them to pay for his breach of contract and get hold of Michael's Agriculture-type blueprints for themselves. Thus, the higher ups made sure that Kilian Whira would get hold of Michael, and that he would have a meeting with Michael Fang.

"It looks like the Bartholomew Corporation values my blueprints highly. To think that their higher ups asked for a meeting. That's quite surprising," Michael said, smiling calmly.

"How do you know...?" Kilian Whira blurted out, shocked that Michael found out about the higher up's plan to drag him to a meeting.

After all, he had yet to tell Michael the reason for their meeting.

"I just made a guess, and you proved the guess to be correct," Michael responded nonchalantly.

From the moment Kilian Whira bombarded him with messages on starnet messengers Michael figured that something was wrong. His suspicion was proven correct when he received a call less than a minute after he sent a reply.

Combining all clues at his disposal, Michael could tell that the incoming event was about to turn interesting.

"We, the Bartholomew Corporation, are indeed very interested in your agriculture-type blueprints. It's a shame that the monthly quota is as low as 100 blueprints a month," Kilian said after he regained his composure.

He had been given a detailed briefing on the things he was supposed to mention to Michael, with the final result being that Michael would allow an alteration of the exclusive contract to increase the monthly quota.

Yet, long before Kilian Whira could influence Michael and convince him to change the contract's terms and conditions, Michael counterattacked.

He accessed his War Rune's storage space and retrieved more than a thousand agriculture-type blueprints at once.

Michael spread the blueprints out in front of Kilian Whira without saying a single word.

"W-wha...t...." Kilian murmured, his eyes shot wide open.

He was trying to say something but no words escaped his lips.

Until now, Michael sold less than 700 agriculture-type blueprints to the Bartholomew Corporation in total, yet he retrieved double the amount from his storage space at once.

With the pile of blueprints spread out in front of Kilian, the Agriculture project could progress rapidly.

But something was wrong. Kilian Whira could tell that instantaneously, and it was not as if Michael was hiding his ulterior move either. On the contrary, Michael made it clear that he wouldn't allow the Bartholomew Corporation to exploit him. He showed them what he was capable of procuring, and that he wouldn't have problems finding other organizations and families, who were equally interested in turning the Barren Lands in the Origin Expanse into fertile land.

"What do you want..." Kilian Whira asked, realizing that the sales pitch provided by the higher ups to lure him had turned useless.

"According to the exclusive contract with the Bartholomew Corporation I have to provide 100 agriculture blueprints a month for a period of 12 months. I cannot sell the agriculture-type blueprints to anyone else in that period either. Is that correct?" Michael asked instead of answering Kilian.

Michael knew that he was correct, but he waited patiently to see Kilian nodding his head in affirmation.

"Let's just change a few clauses in the contract, and I'll provide hundreds of agriculture-type blueprints every month. The number might eventually increase to a thousand, or thousands of blueprints if..." Michael began, only to stop mid-sentence.

He took a deliberate pause and suddenly turned silent, while his attention remained on Kilian.

"If...?" The shop manager repeated, the anxiety in his voice apparent.

"If the Bartholomew Corporation is willing to turn me into an investor of the Agriculture Project," Michael completed the sentence.

Kilian opened his mouth, ready to call Michael a lunatic, but he shut his mouth as quickly as he had opened it.

The Bartholomew Corporation's higher ups were willing to change Michael's exclusive contract, but they would rather pay Michael with cash than turning him into an investor of the Agriculture Project. That way, they could ensure to pay as little as possible while claiming the best benefits.

"To be precise, I will still sell agriculture-type blueprints at a low price. The price will be comparable to the costs of other rare blueprints. That way, I can make sure to cover the costs of procuring the agriculture-type blueprints. In exchange for providing a low price and a larger number of blueprints, I want a share of the Agriculture Project's profits!" Michael announced, still sounding calm and void of worries.

Thanks to Alice, and her vast network system, Michael could research quite a bit about a few organizations and their projects. The Bartholomew Corporation was one of mankind's influential business entities, but they had a hard time procuring more than 200 agriculture-type blueprints in a month. That number included the monthly supply of blueprints Michael provided.

Given his relationship with the Forest Elven Tribe and the expansion of the Underground Forging Hall, Michael could easily procure more than a thousand agriculture-type blueprints a month. In fact, It

wouldn't be a problem to procure two or three thousand blueprints as long as he focused on the production of low-level armaments – which the Forest Elven Tribe loved.

Being able to procure more than ten times the amount a firm like the Bartholomew Corporation can obtain in a month meant that Michael could become an essential investor of the Agriculture Project. He possessed the resources and means to help the Bartholomew Corporation to advance to the next level.

Accepting Michael as an investor would allow the Bartholomew Corporation to charge far ahead of everyone else in the game of turning the Barren Lands into fertile lands. They would make more profit, which they could re-invest to expand their business even further. The Barren Lands would turn into a fertile piece of land and an exclusive property.

Rejecting Michael's offer just because he wanted a profit share was foolish. However, Kilian Whira didn't have the necessary permission to tweak the clauses and modify Michael's exclusive contract to such an extent.

But upon seeing Michael retrieve the blueprints and store them back into his War Rune's storage space, he panicked.

"I...I will have to ask my superiors about your offer... Please don't be hasty, and have some patience..." Kilian said, his voice desperate and his eyes quivering.

But Michael simply got up from the chair.

"I can provide more than a thousand blueprints a month, and my business can expand. If I focus on agriculture-type blueprints, I can procure 3,000 a month. Of course, that won't be easy...so make sure that your superiors understand that I'll not break my neck to procure thousands of blueprints if the profit share they offer is too low!" Michael remarked, hinting to Kilian that he wouldn't allow the Bartholomew Corporation to exploit him anymore.

Now it was his time to take the reins in his control and take charge of the negotiation.

He smiled at Kilian, who stared at him in shock and disbelief before he walked out of the hall, leaving the dumbfounded middle-aged man alone.

"3...3000?!" Kilian blurted out, slumping back into the chair, his face ghastly pale.

"The higher-ups will kill me..."

Chapter 232 The Doomed City

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Michael's territory was flourishing, and the Untamed Jungle's outer ring had been restored to its previous glory at last.

Meanwhile, Xiltra had become a living hell.

After the Jungle Expedition failed, and only three out of 13 Paladins returned alive, Xiltra's atmosphere grew heavier by the day.

Xiltra's citizens were worried about the Untamed Jungle's Curse and that the unknown existences hiding within the shadows of the Untamed Jungle would charge and attempt to destroy the border city.

But something like that never happened.

However, that didn't mean Xiltra's condition remained the same. No, everything changed after the three surviving Paladins returned.

The Paladin's health deteriorated, and they fell into a coma. Not even the best healers of the border city were able to tend to the Paladins' issues. They were oblivious to the disease that affected the three Tier-3 Paladins.

Weeks passed and the Paladins' health hit the lowest point possible. Their lives were on the line, and it was only a matter of time before they would die.

At that point, something shocking occurred. The healers, and the attending staff that tended to the comatose Paladins fell ill. Their skin developed a silverish tinge, and their veins began to turn black.

The chaos essence inside the Paladins had been nourished and began to spread through the entire city.

At first, the higher ups in Xiltra didn't give the situation unfolding in front of them much thought. They considered it a minor issue that could be solved quickly. They couldn't have been more wrong.

Less than a month after the three Paladins returned from the Untamed Jungle, they died. The Chaos Essence that had taken root inside them had devoured their life-force and the nutrients inside their bodies. It had been nourished and grown to affect the people and atmosphere in the Paladins' surroundings. However, the intensity of the chaos essence's influence was not that strong yet. This only changed when the Paladins died, and the Chaos Essence inside them was unleashed to the outside world.

A week after the Paladins' death, Xiltra was forced into a quarantine. Chaos Essence could be found everywhere in Xiltra, spreading like a contagious disease. It took root in the living everywhere and drained their nutrients and life-force to grow stronger and continued to spread like a wildfire.

Chaos Essence required less than a month to drain the life-force and nutrients of a Tier-3 Awakened, who had been administered various potions, and provided the care of Awakened Healers, who used their healing-type Soultraits to improve the Paladins' condition to no avail. Meanwhile, Tierless Natives fell victim to Chaos Essence within 24 hours.

The Chaos Essence invaded their immune system, and took root in the deepest parts of their bodies before requiring a single day to grow stronger by draining its host. Afterward, it would seek a new victim.

Only two weeks passed after the death of the three Paladins, but the casualties had long since exceeded 10,000.

The number of affected individuals rapidly approached the 6-digits, and it was only a matter of time before Xiltra and its surroundings ended up being corrupted without a single trace of life left behind.

This was worrisome, and it was also why the Zentika Empire's Council initiated an emergency meeting.

"Should we annihilate Xiltra? As long as we get rid of Xiltra and a portion of the surrounding land everything should be fine. We can reconstruct the border city, and refill the holes left behind." A younger member of the council proposed.

Destroying the border city and the surrounding land might kill Xiltra's citizens, but they were already dead in the young council member's eyes, in the first place. He could only look at the destruction of the border city as a financial loss, nothing else.

Losing some money in exchange for getting rid of a plague-like disease that spread with exponential growth was certainly worth it. Thus, two more council members voted in favor of the young council member's idea.

"I don't think that will be necessary. The plague-like disease is actually not a disease. It's Chaos Essence," Senator Keltos intervened, his words attracting the attention of the council members seated around the long table.

"Chaos Essence is a rare substance that can be found in a few areas. The Zentika Empire has no grounds with naturally formed Chaos Essence, but the Untamed Jungle does. Speaking about the Untamed Jungle, the silver cloud that had permeated the Untamed Jungle's outer ring was most likely chaos. The Paladins escaped the silver cloud, but they must have been infected already."

The council members around Senator Keltos grew impatient. They weren't in need of a lesson from Senator Keltos. All they wanted was information on how to solve the current predicament in the most-efficient way.

Senator Keltos noticed the impatient gazes lingering on him, and he nodded his head in satisfaction.

"Everyone must have realized that the Untamed Jungle's outer ring had been destroyed. The news should have reached everyone by now. BUT did anyone here receive the news that the Untamed Jungle had been corrupted by Chaos Essence, and that it took less than a month to remove the Chaos Essence and turn the corrupted land back into the flourishing outer ring of the Untamed Jungle it used to be?" Senator Keltos asked, causing a stir in the hearts of the council members.

"If the Untamed Jungle's outer ring was corrupted by chaos essence, how was it fixed?" One of the council members asked, providing Senator Keltos with the opportunity he sought.

"There are two possibilities. First, the Untamed Jungle might have an innate resistance to chaos essence. It's possible that it can digest the chaos essence and utilize it. I don't have hard evidence to back my claim, but it is possible. However, I have the means to prove the second possibility- Chaos Ants!" Senator Keltos declared, while retrieving a few documents from his War Rune's storage space with a wave of his arm.

Information about Chaos Ants was written on the document with a huge amount of details. Senator Keltos must have researched the Untamed Jungle, and the monsters inhabiting the Untamed Jungle for quite a while to find this many details of the Chaos Ants. They had only a small population and stayed underground rather than scavenging across the surface of the Untamed Jungle.

"They...these Chaos Ants...eat the Chaos Essence that has taken root in the corrupted lands...do you want someone to enter the Untamed Jungle secretly to get hold of a few Chaos Ants? If we want to save Xiltra's citizens we would need hundreds, or thousands of Chaos Ants, otherwise, we can only fix Xiltra's land while the citizens die miserably..." An old woman asked, the ridicule in her voice crystal clear.

She had never liked Senator Keltos, and it felt like his ideas and thoughts were getting crazier with every passing day.

Senator Keltos was also at fault for the Jungle Expedition's defeat. If he had revealed all information about the Untamed Jungle openly, the situation would have been completely different.

But that was just the beginning. Senator Keltos had been impatient and allowed his subordinates to start the Jungle Expedition before the promised day, resulting in their humiliating defeat. In the eyes of many council members, Senator Keltos had become an eyesore, and the sole reason for the diminishing reputation of the Zentika Empire's council.

Senator Keltos knew that some council members doubted him, but he couldn't care less.

He shook his head lightly, "No, I don't want to use Chaos Ants. Like you already said, they would be too slow."

"What do you want us to do then?" Someone asked, which caused a faint smile to blossom on Senator Keltos' lips.

"How about we hire Taros, Lord of the Southern Ice Mountains, to take care of this issue?" He asked, creating a stir in the hall.

The hall turned eerily silent and the tension intensified in an instant.

"Are you serious? You want to invite another Lord into the Zentika Empire?"

"He is only at the 2nd Tier. Aren't you too scared of his Soultrait? As a member of the council you should know that he is of no danger to us!" Senator Keltos retorted dismissively and further added while looking at the other members, "Furthermore, Taros is not affiliated to the powers of the Ice Mountain region. He fights for himself."

"But he will ask for a horrendous price. Rumors say that he demanded the Southern Ice Mountains after the other powerhouses requested his help." Another council member interfered. He had heard enough rumors to know that Taros was not someone who willingly followed the orders of other people – even if the council of the Zentika Empire made a special request.

"He will probably ask for a Lord Rift Entrance ticket, but that should be fine. Almost all 100 Lord Entrance Tickets are in our possession by now. In the worst case, we can send our people to kill him inside the Lord Rift. That way, we can expand the Zentika Empire's territory into the Southern Ice Mountains as well!"

The other members of the council thought about Senator Keltos' plan for a long time. It didn't seem like a big problem to offer Taros a Lord Rift Entrance ticket in exchange for saving Xiltra and its citizens.

If Taros acted too arrogant in front of the council, they would order their people to silently take care of the Lord of the Southern Ice Mountains inside the Lord Rift. That way, they could remove a potential future threat.

Using Senator Keltos' plan, they could solve several problems with one solution. Thus, the council agreed, and sent an invite to Taros, the Lord of the Southern Ice Mountains, to visit the Zentika Empire.

As predicted Taros demanded a Lord Rift Entrance ticket in exchange for saving Xiltra. The council agreed and Taros began his work.

The border city suffered a lot until Taros arrived, but everything changed the day he appeared in front of Xiltra's gates. He was welcomed with open arms, and left the day after; the citizens and surrounding lands cleansed of all Chaos Essence.

The Border City was cleansed, rescued by Taros. However, Xiltra was never like before. Too many innocent citizens had died.

The seed of fear instilled in the hearts of the citizens had rooted itself deeply, and the thought of the Untamed Jungle's Curse striking them again caused a severe trauma.

The first citizens chose to relocate elsewhere, starting the momentum that pushed more than half of Xiltra's population to leave and move further away from the Untamed Jungle.

As long as they could escape the Untamed Jungle's Curse they would be fine. That was what most were certain about.

But was it really possible to escape the Untamed Jungle's Curse?

Chapter 233 Diamond

Several days passed since Michael's last meeting with Kilian Whira, the shop manager of the Bartholomew Shop in the Sapphire Lake Military Academy.

He had yet to hear any news about the proposal he made, but that didn't bother him.

Michael was willing to wait patiently. He was not in a rush, after all.

Michael had yet to purchase Tier-2 Artifacts and high-quality ores for himself, Tiara, and Masked Saber as well, thinking that he should wait for the perfect opportunity.

Instead of rushing anything, Michael spent his time training like usual. He practiced the Sacred Rectification body refinement technique to refine his physique. That way, Michael could improve his physique to an even better state than before even though he didn't make any significant progress. Instead of rapidly progressing and charging ahead, Michael took his time to fix the small flaws the Berserker Physique technique left behind.

As a result, his flexibility and agility improved drastically. Michael even felt like his senses had become sharper. However, he was not sure if the improvement of his senses was related to Sacred Rectification, or because his progress with regards to Pandemonium's Requiem improved. The neutral energy absorption technique enhanced his control of origin energy significantly, providing a considerable enhancement all over his body as origin energy circulated through him at all times.

Ceasurium Menta and Memory Lane received the highest boost. Both techniques reached the 2nd Stage, improving his memorization ability, and his brain's overall capabilities.

By advancing to the 2nd Stage with Memory Lane, Michael caught up with the other freshmen. In fact, he surpassed the progress of most average students, providing him with enough leeway to study ahead in the Old Language and Ancient Ruins Courses.

During the last few months, Michael never got sufficient time to study the Temple of the Forbidden. He had never forgotten about the Temple of the Forbidden, but he had also been painfully aware of the fact that it would take a while to find out more about the Old Origin Language, to learn it, and to grow strong enough to face the dangers lurking inside the Temple of the Forgotten.

The more Michael studied about Ancient Ruins the more evident was that the Temple of the Forgotten was dangerous and that he would die the instant he entered it. His current strength was simply not enough to even think about taking a peek inside the temple.

'In a few weeks, the Lord Rift will open.' Michael was deep in thought while undergoing Silverian Schild's Limit Breaker workout.

Despite wearing a heavyweight combat suit weighing more than 700 kilograms he could move around efficiently while circulating origin energy through his body.

Michael was not even using his Soultraits right now. He solely relied on his physical strength and the minor physical enhancement he received from circulating origin evenly through his body to complete Silverian's devilish workout.

Simultaneously, his mind kept distracting him, bombarding him with thoughts about the Lord Rift and the preparations he had yet to complete.

'Tiara should advance to Tier-2 today or tomorrow. Masked Saber will also advance to Tier-2 in a week or two. That's good, but will that be enough? We'll only be at the Lowest-stage. Our refinement degree will probably be lower than everyone else.'

Michael knew that Tiara was quite powerful. Her spatial awareness and wild instincts, combined with her unique Soultraits allowed her to unleash power that was way higher than her rank suggested. Masked Saber was similar in that regard.

He was actually stronger than the Forest Elves in terms of teamwork and power utilization. That was also why Michael felt more comfortable fighting next to Tiara and Masked Saber. The three of them had great teamwork and they understood each other without the need to exchange words.

In a chaotic place like a Rift where dangerous surprises could appear at any point, Michael felt that his chance of survival would be much higher with Tiara and Masked Saber by his side.

Once the Limit Breaker workout was done. Michael took a quick shower and changed into a neat set of clothes. Michael possessed dozens of clothing sets by now – all stored neatly inside his War Rune's storage space.

He cleaned them every now and then – mostly when he was deep in thought, trying to find a solution to certain issues or to find out the most efficient ways to execute some plans –, and it was quite enjoyable.

After he put on his clean clothes, Michael and the other members of the Limit Breaker Course left for the cafeteria together. They ordered the Jumbo plates and ate together.

While having lunch, Michael received a notification. He opened the holographic screen, just to halt in his tracks when he saw the message that popped up in starnet messenger.

[Kilian Whira(shop manager): Sir Fang, I have great news for you. I am pleased to tell you that the executive director of the Bartholomew Corporation is willing to negotiate with you. Are you free this afternoon at 3 pm?]

'Was about time that you guys made a move,' Michael thought, taking in a big breath to inhale the delicious aroma of the remaining dishes on the jumbo plate before he put away the plate to rush out of the cafeteria.

It was already 2 pm, and Michael had yet to validate a few nasty pieces of information that he found while researching a few organizations.

He spent the next hour searching for Alice Zenovia. Michael found her after half an hour, but she had only a few minutes of spare time to discuss his tactic with him.

At first, Alice was a little stupefied when she heard that Michael had the means to make an executive director of the Bartholomew Corporation pay him attention. That was not easy, especially not for someone, who didn't know how to utilize his connections well.

She listened to Michael's idea and provided a few pieces of advice. When she found out about Michael's agriculture-type blueprints, Alice felt like convincing Michael to sell the blueprints to the Zenovia family. Unfortunately, the vast majority of the Zenovia family were Lords in cold regions – most of them having frozen ground at that.

Michael would make more losses dealing with the Zenovia family than utilizing the vast range of connections the Bartholomew Corporation attained over the course of several centuries.

"This kid is really different. Good thing that I invited him to the Sapphirelake Military Academy. If not, mankind might have missed out on a little treasure," Alice mused quietly after Michael left.

She was pleased with herself for finding a diamond in the rough but the smile lasted only for a few seconds before her expression changed again. The smile disappeared and she cleared her throat turning around. Alice Zenovia went back to her class, her usually cold expression back on her face, hiding her true emotions.

Meanwhile, it was 3:00 pm when a holographic projection appeared above the table in front of Michael. He arrived in the Bartholomew Shop in the nick of time and was led to a soundproof room where the negotiations would be held.

The projection of a middle-aged woman with long black hair and dark eyes manifested. She had an intense gaze and stared straight at Michael. Michael felt her gaze moving from his head to toe to analyze him thoroughly.

"My name is Helen Ascaln, and I was given the responsibility to deal with you. Let's not beat around the bush and finish business quickly," Helen Ascaln said straightforwardly, her gaze never leaving Michael.

Michael didn't avoid eye contact either. He stared back at her, his gaze filled with determination.

"No matter how the negotiations end, your membership card will be upgraded to the Diamond level. You'll be given higher discounts and you can access the second highest level of our network system. Furthermore, as a Diamond-level member, you will have access to the contact details of all members of the Bartholomew Corporation. You might not think that the last point is necessary, but you will quickly realize that the contact details are quite useful.

In addition to all of this, Diamond-level members receive a heads-up for special promotion events and your orders are prioritized. Our staff will ensure your satisfaction in any facility affiliated with the Bartholomew Corporation!" Helen Ascaln explained, studying Michael's reaction to the generous gift he was given.

However, Michael's expression didn't budge at all. He was unfazed and responded with a nonchalant nod.

"You don't seem surprised, Mr. Fang. Seems like you have high expectations about today's deal," Helen Ascaln remarked with a professional smile plastered on her face.

"Of course not. The membership card upgrade is something you are gifting me to make me feel guilty. You want my conscience to be guilt-ridden at the thought of exploiting the Bartholomew Corporation for a higher profit share of the Agriculture Project," Michael pointed out calmly before he added with a devilish smile on his face.

"Unfortunately, I'm not that foolish. I know the limit of the Bartholomew Corporation, and how valuable the contribution of my agriculture-type blueprints is. So let's put aside this nonsense and start negotiating!"

Chapter 234 High Treehouse

"18% is the lowest I'll go. I know that the Bartholomew Corporation can pay that much. It's better than seeing our cooperation fail, right?" Michael said, his fingers tapping lightly on the table's smooth surface.

Since the start of the negotiation, more than ten minutes passed, and they entered a stalemate. Michael started his negotiation with a 25% profit share, thinking that it was necessary to exaggerate his demand a little. However, he didn't expect Helen Ascaln to start with 2.5%. Her offer was way too low, given that Michael was willing to harvest thousands of agriculture-type blueprints every month.

He could procure tens of times the amount the Bartholomew Corporation could procure in a month. Did the Bartholomew Corporation take him for a fool?

Fortunately, Michael wasn't defeated that easily. He knew that he had the advantage and that he could make a choice. The Bartholomew Corporation needed him, not the other way around.

His final provocation broke Helen Ascaln's confidence. Michael mentioned the Olympus – a big organization that had been clashing with the Bartholomew Corporation for decades. So far, none of them could gain a big advantage over the other, leading to intense competition between the two organizations.

Their most-intense competition was in the Barren Lands with both organizations attempting to carry out reforestation on the Barren Land to turn it fertile again.

Losing a treasure trove like Michael meant that the Bartholomew Corporation would lose their competitive edge, and the opportunity to gain an advantage against the Olympus. Michael could provide them with more agriculture-type blueprints than they could procure in a year or two.

By using him, they would not only emerge victorious against the Olympus, but they would be able to widen the gap.

"You...15%...I can agree to give you 15% of the Agriculture Project's profit share but--...." Helen agreed reluctantly while having a hard time acknowledging that her mission to tame him had failed miserably.

She was certain that her negotiation skills were great and that she could convince Michael to accept a profit share of no more than 10%. However, that wasn't even close to the final result.

"18%." Michael intercepted Helen. He got up from his chair, his hands resting on the table in front of him, "Or I'm out. I can pay the termination fee of the exclusive contract immediately as well."

Michael had done enough research on the market, the Barren Lands, and mankind's organizations to know how valuable his blueprints were, and what he could demand by selling the agriculture-type blueprints in bulk, and exclusively to one organization.

"Sit down...please. The Bartholomew Corporation can agree to your demand. 18% it is... I'll send you a draft of the contract soon. Read through it and ask Kilian if you have any questions. If there is nothing wrong, we can proceed with the contract signing," Helen Asclan said, evidently trying hard to keep her composure.

Losing an important negotiation against a young Lord, who had not even become an Awakened a full year ago, and wasn't from a big merchant family, felt like a slap in the face.

Michael instinctively knew how to put pressure, what to mention at particular points during the negotiation, and when to push ahead. It was infuriating, but also something that deserved her utmost respect.

Most Lords focused on their military power to increase their territory's strength. They were less interested in economics, brain games and the importance of negotiation skills.

That seemed different in Michael's case. The young Lord was not even 19 years old, but he had already reached the 2nd Tier. Michael was also a freshman in the Sapphirelake Military Academy. He was far from weak and knew a thing or two about advanced negotiation.

Michael felt that his back was drenched in sweat when he heard Helen's words. He wanted to sigh in relief but knew that it would be a grave mistake to show a sign of weakness.

No matter how he looked at the situation, Michael had scored a big deal today. The only work he had to do was providing agriculture-type blueprints, and he would obtain 18% of the Agriculture Project's profit as long as he provided agriculture-type blueprints, and a base fee equivalent to the price of a rare blueprint for every agriculture-type blueprint he sold.

That was more than enough for him, given that most of the hard work would be done by others. Furthermore, Michael didn't want to exploit the Bartholomew Corporation any further, knowing that they would start loathing him if he pressed harder on an even higher profit share. He knew that he was already in a very good position, and that the Bartholomew Corporation could accept his demands without any hard feelings.

They would still gain a lot from the deal, and would be willing to retain him as a customer and business partner. If he had asked for a higher profit share that might have been a little different. They might even consider him a greedy bastard and blacklist him from their facilities if he went overboard.

Given the 18% profit share, Michael would only be considered a sly fox, maybe even a feisty businessman.

That was not too bad.

Michael left Bartholomew Shop after his business was done. He returned to his room and entered the Origin Expanse, where he encountered Lilica.

"We'll focus on procuring more agriculture-type blueprints for the time being. Is the demand for low-level armaments still as high as before?" Michael asked.

Lilica gave him a nod and smiled wryly, "All Forest Elven Lords are going crazy over your low-level armaments. Their durability is exceptional, and the energy conductivity is simply phenomenal. We were pretty lucky with the ore deposits in the lizard cave. The deposits are huge and we can forge a wide variety of armaments that can be wielded efficiently by people up to the Peak of Tier-1. The blacksmith's proficiency increases rapidly as well, resulting in a faster armament production. We're currently

considering introducing more armaments to the Forest Elven Lords since they loved the changes in the last batch."I think you should take a look at panDasnovel.com

Lilica's eyes gleamed in excitement as she reported the situation to Michael. She was happy that she could still help her race by providing them with low-level armaments. The support she provided was even better than it had been when they were still an ordinary adventurer team in Xiltra.

Right now, she could actually do something to support her people.

In exchange, Michael was given exceptional benefits as well. Seeing Michael benefit just as much as her people from the deal was great. It was a perfect relationship, a symbiosis any organism dreamed about.

"Oh? That sounds great. In that case, We should continue to focus on the Forging Hall's expansion for a while – at least until I return from the Lord Rift" Michael said, encouraging Lilica to work harder.

He had yet to give detailed orders about the territory's development for the next few weeks. For now, he could give daily orders to tweak their initial plan to make sure that everyone worked on the projects that provided most benefits. However, the daily orders would be rendered useless if he was absent. That was also why Michael struggled a little bit trying to provide both comfort for his subjects and obtaining exceptional results.

'I should finish the deal with the Bartholomew Corporation first, and deal with the rest after that.'

With that in mind, Michael spent a few more minutes talking to Lilica, asking a few questions before he excused himself. He walked over to warehouse nr. 3 where all blueprints were stored safely. Releasing his origin energy, Michael engulfed a few crates to pull them inside the War Rune's storage space.

Once that was completed, Michael spent an hour walking through his territory. He talked a lot to his subjects and analyzed the development of his territory. Doubts about the territory's infrastructure surfaced in his mind, and questions about the appearance and sturdiness of certain treehouse complexes.

Instead of leaving his doubts and questions open, Michael chose to meet up with the architects and workers responsible for the constructions. The architects and workers were a little worried when they

were called to meet their Lord, but Michael's warm expression and calming presence was enough to dispel their worries the moment they entered the meeting hall inside the wooden manor.

"There is no need to worry. I just want to solve a few doubts and find out why you altered the treehouse complex blueprints. I might not be a master in this field, but it looks like the treehouse complexes have been connected much more efficiently than before. They're more durable with the same amount of resources, if not less," Michael pointed out after his subjects sat down.

They looked at him, only to see a spark of interest in Michael's eyes.

Michael didn't care that they had altered the construction blueprint of the treehouse complexes. No, he was happy about that!

The modified blueprint was much better in every possible aspect. It created more space with less resources, and maintained the same exceptional sturdiness as before.

"After reading the manuals and instruction notes you purchased, esteemed Lord, I was filled with doubts. At first, I dispelled the doubts, but after weeks of working in the Untamed Jungle, I couldn't help myself anymore. I altered one of the duplicated blueprints and began to experiment a little bit with them – in my freetime, of course. At last, we finally dared to construct one of the High Treehouses..." The architect explained slowly, trying to contain the excitement that rushed through him when the memories and result of his hard work resurfaced.

He was proud of his work, and that could be seen clearly.

"You did a good job. How about we inspect the High Treehouse a little bit before we start mass-producing it? Would you be fine with that?" Michael asked without much thought.

But the Architect jumped up, his eyes glowing.

"It has only been one day since we completed the High Treehouses, but I'm more than willing to share my research with everyone as long as it helps the territory! You pay lots of attention to details, my Lord!" The Architect exclaimed.

Michael just smiled. It was his job to pay attention to the territory. If he didn't pay attention to his territory, who would?

He spent the next twenty minutes gathering the architects and workers to share the news of the High Treehouse. He rewarded the architect for his invention and showed everyone that they were not only allowed to conduct their own research in his territory but also that they would be rewarded for great inventions.

'I hope we'll see some nice inventions soon enough,' Michael mused after completing the inspection and he left the Origin Expanse.

He had a contract to sign, and wanted to get rid of 2500 Agriculture-type blueprints.

Furthermore, a bunch of Tier-2 Artifacts were waiting for him to be purchased.

It was about time to spend a fortune on himself!

Chapter 235 Upgrade

After Michael read through the documents several times, he signed them with a satisfied smile on his face.

A few clauses had been rather confusing at first, but they made sense after a while.

'So I have a minimum quota to fulfill for the next two years to maintain a profit share of 18%. Well, that's fine with me. The quota is not that high, either way.'

Michael didn't have any issues with the contract. Providing 24,000 Agriculture-type blueprint within the next two years was not too high. Michael was certain that he would spend less than a year to fulfill the quota.

He accessed the storage space of his War Rune and retrieved five crates. Each of the crates stored roughly 500 Agriculture-type blueprints.

"There are 2500 blueprints in the crates. Feel free to use them!" Michael said lightly while watching Kilian Whira open the crates one by one.

Kilian's expression changed with every crate he opened, and he ended up staring blankly at Michael once all crates had been opened.

"I...will transfer the base fee immediately... Feel free to cross-check the transaction," Kilian said, a little stupefied.

The base fee alone was already enough to turn Michael into a filthy rich business tycoon. It was more than enough money to make big purchase orders. Adding the discount and priority clause of the Diamond Bartholomew Membership, Michael began to source the shopping catalog with great interest.

'Since I extracted big masses of impurities during the second natural cleansing, I should be able to bind five Tier-2 Artifacts. My refinement degree is also pretty high, so the toll exerted on my body won't be too much...right?' Michael wondered, trying to gauge how many Artifacts he could bind.

'In that case, shouldn't I focus on extracting the impurities within Tiara when she advances to Tier-2?'

Michael had already attempted to use Extraction on his Summons after they advanced to Tier-1. Unfortunately, the extraction of impurities within Summons was rather difficult. It was quite painful for the Summons, and the amount of impurities he could extract didn't improve the Summons' combat prowess significantly.

This kind of problem didn't exist when extracting impurities from Awakened. By accessing their War Runes with Extraction, Michael could extract more impurities, and ensure that the Awakened wouldn't feel much pain.

Michael was deep in thought as he researched the online catalog of the Bartholomew Shop. Given his diamond-level access, Michael was able to see the Artifacts that would have been hidden with the gold-level membership he had until a while ago.

"How about we do this?" Michael mumbled as he began to add one Artifact to the shopping cart after another. His fingers moved rapidly, adding dozens of Artifacts in the cart.

An hour later, Michael had more than 200 Artifacts and other goods in the shopping cart.

"Now, let's start comparing, and removing."

It was only an hour later that less than a dozen Artifacts were left in the shopping cart, creating two sets that were perfect for Michael and Tiara to use.

Michael found another bow designed by the same creators who had manufactured the Siltang Bow. The bow was called Zark, and it had the same functions as the Siltang Bow. However, since Zark was a Tier-2 Artifact it could store much more energy and create a bigger variety of energy-condensed arrows.

The creators worked together multiple times to create a series of Artifacts ranging from Tier-1 to Tier-3. The Siltang Bow and the Zark were both part of the set, and Michael was more than willing to reach deep into his pockets to buy Zark.

Other than Zark, Michael got hold of a natural 3-Star Tier-2 Artifact called Wyverntooth Spear. According to the weapon's description, the Wyverntooth Spear had dropped after defeating a Wyvern, and it increased the strength and agility of its user.

The wyvern tooth at the top of the spear was blackish in color and had been ground to look similar to Seron Voulge's lengthy, razor-sharp blade.

Since Michael was usually fully occupied with the utility of multiple Soultraits, he didn't want to own too many complicated Artifacts. Thus, he replaced the Onyx Dragon Armor Set with the 3-Star Tier-2 Typhern Leather Armor Set. It was an armor set consisting of a chestplate, leg guards, and gloves. Just like the Onyx Dragon Armor Set, the Typhern Leather Armor Set had been engraved with protection enchantments.

All in all, Michael didn't change much about his equipment. He merely replaced his outdated Tier-1 equipment with similar 3-Star Tier-2 Artifacts.

Michael purchased a similar Armor Set for Tiara, in addition to a 3-Star Tier-2 Shield Artifact. If Tiara was able to bind some more Artifacts, Michael would return to the shop and get her some more. On the other hand, Masked Saber was given a wide variety of high-quality ores to choose from to make sure that the Weaponsmith had the means to create a perfect weapon for Masked Saber

He also purchased a bunch of high-quality potions since he couldn't brew them in his territory just yet. They had been strengthened with some Soultraits, amplifying their effects drastically.

Michael found an upgraded version of the Orb of Hostility as well. It had a range of 30 kilometers, which was perfect for his territory. The energy consumption was quite high but Michael made sure to purchase enough monster cores to match the energy consumption rather easily.

A wide variety of lethal traps entered his shopping cart as well. Michael and his people would install traps near the border to the Zentika Empire's plains. That was one of his means to make sure that his people won't have to fear attacks from the Zentika Empire while he was away.

Other than that, Michael made sure that his blacksmiths, alchemists, and enchanters provided his army with everything they needed – ranging from weapons, and armor, to potions and low-level enchantments on some armaments.

Providing the best equipment for his army wasn't easy. It required a considerable amount of funds and time.

As such, three days passed by before Michael was finally done preparing everything to depart. He helped Tiara extract as many impurities as possible after she advanced to Tier-2. Afterward, he gave her the Artifacts as promised earlier.

She bound them to her War Rune and grew stronger. The external enhancement provided by the Artifacts increased her physical strength, agility, and perception by more than 30%.

Michael was no different. His Artifacts increased his strength drastically.

"Can you exchange your Desert Combat Suit with other armaments such as leather armor or light metal armor?" Michael asked Masked Saber at one point.

He was not sure why but Masked Saber never revealed his face. His mask seemed to be attached to his face. It was quite weird.

"The Will doesn't allow me to reveal myself to others. This includes my face and even my skin. The Will of the Origin Expanse will eliminate me if I reveal my face or skin to anyone," Masked Saber revealed for the first time. I think you should take a look at pantheonovel.com

He remained calm and added, "But I can change my clothes as long as my entire body remains shrouded."

'The Will of the Origin Expanse put restriction on his existence as a Summon? Is that why he is only considered a 4-Star Summon?'

The Will of the Origin Expanse had always been quite weird. It was nothing new.

However, it was quite interesting to find out that Masked Saber had such a unique condition put on his existence. He had to be a really powerful existence to have such an annoying condition put on him!

Michael forwarded the details of Masked Saber's new armor to the Weaponsmith and the other Blacksmiths. He also went to the tailors to make sure that they would create full-body clothing using special sturdy threads and leather as core components.

Using the best materials to ensure that nobody could destroy Masked Saber's clothes was the easiest way to protect him. After all, it would be the worst to see Masked Saber die if his clothes were to rip mid-battle and weapons cut through him.

At last, Michael prepared to leave his territory once again. It felt like an eternity since he had gone out hunting, but he finally did it again with Masked Saber and Tiara.

They began to train and hunt together to improve their teamwork even further. Other than that, they almost did every other activity together to attain a better understanding of the other parties, ensuring that they would know their personality traits and everything else that could influence the course of the battle.

This played out pretty well. Michael, Tiara, and Masked Saber were already very compatible with each other. Their spatial awareness, perception, and combat experience were strong enough to observe the battlefield with great detail.

Owing to their great teamwork, the group of three soon encountered a hideout of Silvermoon Panthers. Silvermoon Panthers were agile enough to outrun Low Tier-2 Monsters and in possession of razor-sharp claws that cut deep into the flesh of Lowest Tier-2 Monsters with highly endurable hide.

Their group was quite big, consisting of eight members at Tier-2, and a dozen Peak Tier-1 Silvermoon Panthers.

The Silvermoon Panthers surrounded Masked Saber and Tiara the moment they found them. They were certain of their victory as they moved around the two beings who had invaded their territory.

What they didn't expect was to hear a loud whistling sound cutting through the air. Several energy-condensed arrows whooshed through the air, slicing into the necks of the Peak Tier-1 Silvermoon Panthers.

The Tier-2 Silvermoon Panthers reacted fast enough, evading the arrows charging at them with high speed by a hair's breadth.

Michael discovered the group of Silvermoon Panthers long before they surrounded Masked Saber and Tiara. He warned them and climbed up a tree before retrieving Zark and the Typhern Leather Armor Set. It was the first time he used Zark, but he was already familiar with its enchantments given that the energy storage and energy arrow enchantments were the same as that of the Siltang Bow's.

Michael killed six Silvermoon Panthers in a few seconds. The Tier-2 Silvermoon Panthers had discovered his location, but Tiara and Masked Saber already jumped into action, restricting the movements of the Silvermoon Panthers.

Michael used Enhancement on the Spirit Whip Symbol before manifesting three Spirit Whips simultaneously. Controlling them at once, Michael lashed out at the closest Silvermoon Panthers. Taken by surprise, they suffered a heavy mental blow. One of the Silvermoon Panthers struck by the Spirit Whip was only at the Peak of Tier-1. It suffered too much damage from the mental attack, causing it to collapse on the spot.

The other two Silvermoon Panthers didn't collapse on the spot, but they suffered a heavy blow from Tiara's silver spear. It pierced one of the Panthers' necks while the other one was killed by Masked Saber's silver energy blade that cut through the air like a boomerang.

The silver energy exploded upon coming in contact with the target, turning a severe attack into a mortal blow that killed the Tier-2 Silvermoon Panther at once.

Michael continued to use Enhancement and Spirit Whip in combination, but he continued to use Zark to condense more arrows which he aimed precisely at the Panthers' vital spots.

After weeks of training with Annabelle, Michael's focus had improved, his aim was more precise, and he could fight more flexibly using his Soultraits and bow together. His progress with the mind-refining technique Caesurium Menta helped him a lot to multi-task as well.

That was also why he could strike the Silvermoon Panthers with enhanced Spirit Whips before unleashing a barrage of energy arrows onto them.

The damage he caused by combining his arrow barrage with two of his Soultraits was already enormous. He didn't even have to use Eagle Eye actively at this point. Eagle Eyes' passive enhancement was already strong enough to enhance his eyesight to an extreme degree.

While Michael fought at mid-range using enhanced Spirit Whips and his bow, Masked Saber passed through the rows of Panthers like a typhoon. His moves were swift and nimble, evading the panthers' razor-sharp claws before inflicting severe damage with his silver energy-covered blade.

A small cut was all he had to inflict to injure his opponents and release a burst of silver energy to increase the wound's severity.

Tiara's fighting style was similar, yet not. She was nimble and swift, but her attacks were fierce and lethal, changing her direction and movement at any given point without losing the slightest bit of momentum.

Michael had yet to find out more information about her Soultrait, but it felt like she could change the force inside her body at any given point. It was a unique Soultrait that was extremely difficult to control. Tiara's Soultrait required lots of effort and research to become as strong as it was right now.

Michael knew that he would never grow tired of watching her fight. It was simply too intriguing, especially since her fighting style seemed predictable, yet unpredictable at the same time.

It was awe-inspiring and motivated Michael to continue tweaking his fighting style as well. That way, nobody would be able to study his former battles and create a strategy to defeat him easily, after all.

Less than ten minutes after the battle began, Michael, Tiara, and Masked Saber emerged victorious.

They won without sustaining any injuries, yet none of them was satisfied with the result of the battle.

Their individual combat prowess was great, and the strategy they utilized was not bad either, however, the coordination of their team hadn't been as exceptional as they expected.

"I think we have a lot to fix," Michael mumbled silently to himself, replaying the battle in slow-motion in his mind, and both Tiara and Masked Saber agreed unanimously.

"I think so too."

Chapter 236 Rematch I

Adjusting their fighting style and creating combat strategies that depended on perfect sync between Michael, Tiara, and Masked Saber was certainly not easy. It required time and effort.

The trio was not even aware how quickly time flew by as the days elapsed in the blink of an eye.

Michael used Extraction more often than usual these days. He was growing more intrigued in finding out the several uses of the Extraction Soultrait, and researched Extraction whenever he had time.

Since Extraction was a 6-Star Soultrait right now, Michael couldn't even fathom its limit. He didn't have enough energy to unleash Extraction's full power.

In the last few days, Michael used Extraction on monster corpses and to pinpoint a few more ore deposits in the lizard cave. His harvest was exceptional. Not only was it possible to summon dozens of Summons by extracting the loot of a few Tier-2 Monsters, but finding out the ore deposits hidden underground turned out to be of great value. They found a handful of rare ores and some big deposits which would sustain the territory's consumption for several years.

Michael grew increasingly more curious about the limits of Extraction. He wondered if there were things he couldn't extract, or if it was just not possible to extract certain objects and things because he was too weak. Maybe, he just didn't meet the requirements to extract certain objects either.

There were numerous factors Michael had to take into consideration upon using Extraction, and he wanted to find out what those factors were – and how to work his way around them.

After fighting hundreds of fierce monsters in the last few days, Michael grew more accustomed to the changes his body underwent after advancing to Tier-2 and the external enhancement he'd obtained from several Tier-2 Artifacts.

He could tell that his strength had increased a lot and that he could still improve a little bit more. Michael was just not sure how much he could improve at his level – and that was something he wanted to find out.

He had grown a lot stronger since the warfare with the Jungle Expedition, but Michael was not sure just how much.

Michael had yet to go all out against someone he fought before to find out how much stronger he'd grown.

It was about time to find and challenge Lincoln!

A few days before the Lord Rift opened, Michael approached Lincoln Piedra in the morning. Every student of the Limit Breaker course was in the training hall, talking to their friends, or stretching for the training hell that awaited them.

Michael halted in front of Lincoln, his eyes exuding nothing but determination and seriousness.

"I want to fight you." He challenged Lincoln, who raised an eyebrow.

"You want to fight me? I guess you don't mean our standard spars with that." He responded calmly as if he had been expecting Michael to challenge him eventually.

"How about right now? Are you ready to go all out?" Lincoln added with a mischievous smile blossoming on his lips.

After spending several months in the Saphirelake Military Academy, Lincoln was certain that Michael was one of the least predictable students.

Lincoln didn't spend too much time with seniors, or other students, but he often visited the ranking arena to watch the ranked freshmen fight. Yet, despite watching the ranked matches, Lincoln clearly felt more excited whenever he sparred with Michael.

Their first fight during the second real combat assessment gave Lincoln a good taste of Michael's willpower and battle spirit. But that was not everything after months of hard work. Lincoln witnessed Michael's rapid growth and he was curious how strong he had become.

"I'm always ready to fight!" Michael responded.

They used the empty space in the training hall to create a small arena. Michael stood at one end while Lincoln moved to the other side.

"Show me what you got!" Lincoln demanded, adjusting his stance smoothly.

Zeke appeared at the outer ring of the small arena to act as the referee of the battle. He was not sure what both Michael and Lincoln were so excited about all of a sudden, but Zeke was also curious to find out how strong both Lincoln and Michael had grown.

Zeke raised one of his arms high into the air. He moved his hands down in a rapid motion while shouting aloud, "Start!"

The start of the battle changed everything. Michael used Enhancement thrice on Eagle Eyes, which was also actively utilized. Michael had just fully utilized Enhancement and Eagle Eyes when a human-sized stone fist whizzed through the arena.

It was faster than a cannonball and clearly fierce enough to pierce a huge hole in the endurable bodies of Tier-2 Monsters. Michael dived to the side the moment the stone fist had been conjured.

He rolled on the ground, pushed his feet off the ground to get up swiftly and manifest Zark and the Typhern Leather Armor Set. Michael used Enhancement on the Typhern Leather Armor Set once while Zark was enhanced four times in succession. I think you should take a look at

Next, Michael conjured the strongest energy arrows, pulled the bowstring back, and released the arrow. The energy arrow cut through the air with a terrific velocity the moment it had been released. Zeke frowned as he was barely able to follow the energy-condensed arrow's trajectory, but he didn't think much about it.

Meanwhile, Lincoln had already manifested a second stone fist. He released it the moment Michael's arrow came at him.

But instead of crushing the energy-condensed arrow, Lincoln's stone fist burst apart upon colliding with the energy arrow. The energy arrow was extremely resilient and it had been released with the force of a four-layer Enhancement Tier-2 bow. Underestimating the arrow's lethality and force was a grave mistake.

Fortunately, Lincoln didn't make this mistake. The first giant fist was merely a means to test the power of Michael's energy arrow and to slow down the arrow. Lincoln had already conjured a second stone fist when the first burst apart. He released it instantaneously, forcefully halting the arrow's advance.

Michael, on the other hand, frowned deeply. He could tell that his four-layer Enhancement drained too much energy compared to the manifestation of two stone fists.

'I will lose a battle of attrition like this.'

Michael's conclusion was simple. Lincoln had a 6-Star Soultrait related to the Earth, and his Inheritance technique allowed his Mind, Soul, and Body to grow more compatible with his Soultrait. Growing more compatible meant that the strain on the mind wasn't high upon unleashing his Soultrait and that Lincoln's origin energy would be altered subtly to increase the potency of Earth-attributed creations.

Michael learned a lot about Inheritance techniques thanks to Alice, and their advantages could be summarized quite simply; Inheritance techniques increased the Soul Power of certain abilities, they decreased the Soultrait's energy consumption, they allowed the practitioner to grow more accustomed to using the Soultrait and research the Soultrait's in-depth easily, and they increased the compatibility between Awakened and Soultrait.

That was something Michael witnessed clearly in front of him right now. Lincoln was having a much easier time using his Soultrait compared to a few months ago. His strength had increased considerably as well. Lincoln was already at the Low-stage of Tier-2.

Lincoln's degree of refinement was quite far in the Low-stage, providing a drastic advantage against Michael.

The War Rune's refinement degree didn't seem too important until the 2nd Tier. It was not difficult to be physically stronger than others with a higher refinement degree as long as one possessed powerful Artifacts and high mastery in body refinement techniques. However, it wasn't that simple after advancing to Tier-2.

After advancing to the 2nd Tier it was increasingly more difficult to progress with the refinement of the body. At the same time, the refinement degree of the War Rune provided a higher enhancement than

most Artifacts. Only rare natural 3-Star Artifacts could rival the increase in strength provided by a higher refinement degree of the War Rune.

Unfortunately, Michael had only one natural Artifact. Even then, it was highly likely for Lincoln to have bound better Artifacts to his War Rune.

'A close-distance battle?' Michael asked himself one moment, just to burst toward Lincoln the next instant.

Zark was replaced by the Wyverntooth Spear, which he coated in three layers of Enhancement. Lincoln conjured more stone fists, which he threw at Michael. Michael evaded one of the stone fists before slashing at the second stone fist.

Three layers of Enhancement were enough to turn the Wyverntooth Saber into a weapon comparable to a peak-quality natural 4-Star Artifact. It consumed a considerable amount of energy, but Michael could cut through the incoming stone fist quite easily.

The stone fist crumbled and burst apart. However, something was wrong.

Michael's expression distorted as the stone fist burst apart. He could sense energy fluctuations in the stone fist a millisecond before it burst apart.

Thanks to his high perception, and the ability to see the faintest details in his surroundings, Michael could react in time. The stone fist burst apart like a shotgun bullet, releasing smaller pebbles that shot through the vicinity with horrifyingly high velocity.

Unable to evade all of them, Michael twisted his body to avoid the most dangerous pebbles, while allowing the rest to impact upon himself. A dozen pebbles impacted hard, causing little damage to his shoulders and right thigh.

Michael grimaced through the pain. He regained his balance and position by moving around his own axis with the momentum he'd used to twist his body. Afterward, he shot closer to Lincoln once again.

Two Spirit Whips, enhanced through Enhancement appeared above Lincoln's head the next moment. They lashed out at Lincoln, causing considerable mental damage.

However since Michael had already fought against Lincoln using Spirit Whip, there was no way that Lincoln was not prepared to face Michael's mental attack.

But what Lincoln wasn't prepared for was the strength Michael's mental attack had gained in the last few months.

Lincoln's vision turned hazy and his mind felt exceedingly heavy as two mental attacks impacted one after another on his mind.

'What the...'

Chapter 237 Rematch II

The last time Michael and Lincoln fought with their Soultraits against each other, it was during the second Real Combat assessment.

At that time, Enhancement was still Lesser Enhancement. Both Lesser Enhancement and Spirit Whip had been 2-Star Soultraits, and couldn't be compared to their current power, at all.

But the upgrade from a 2-Star Soultrait to a 4-Star Soultrait was not everything that had changed. The population in Michael's territory had expanded rapidly, and the firmness of every subject's Link of Loyalty was much higher than before. Both of these factors provided a considerable increase in his Soultraits' Soul Power, further increasing their potency and might.

Lincoln expected Michael's mental attack to have grown stronger, but he couldn't fathom that Michael was capable of creating two mental attacks several times stronger than before.

He had grossly miscalculated Michael's increase of strength and was struggling to control the stone fists around him.

Lincoln failed to maintain using his Soultrait after the mental attacks struck him heavily.

Michael knew that his attack worked the moment the enhanced Spirit Whips struck Lincoln. Without wasting time, he accelerated and appeared in front of Lincoln.

After a moment of consideration, Michael manifested a third Spirit Whip. Then, he began to attack Lincoln with all three enhanced Spirit Whips, while simultaneously striking out with the Wyverntooth Spear.

Lincoln groaned in pain and discomfort when the Spirit Whips struck him. However, he still sensed the incoming danger of the Wyverntooth Spear. Lincoln moved to the side swiftly to evade the blade piercing deep inside his flesh.

But Michael's Eagle Eyes had already detected Lincoln's movement trajectory. His leg shot forward, tripping Lincoln as he moved aside.

The Wyverntooth Spear spun around Michael's body, gaining enough momentum to deliver a feisty blow to Lincoln as he crashed onto the ground.

Michael sensed victory approaching him, but he didn't lower his guard. He knew that he wouldn't actually win until the battle ended.

Furthermore, Lincoln was not an easy opponent to defeat. He was the descendant of High Nobles, in possession of a 6-Star Soultrait, more than a decade of training, an Inheritance technique with his mastery, and enough resources to grow into a powerhouse.

Seeing the battle spirit in Lincoln's eyes, Michael instinctively knew that the battle was not yet over even though Lincoln was on the ground and the Wyverntooth Spear was only a few centimeters away from cutting deep inside Lincoln's chest.

With a devious smile, Lincoln released a ginormous amount of energy all of a sudden, and his body expanded in all directions. His skin turned brownish-gray, and the blade that was supposed to pierce easily through his skin and cut deep into his flesh was forcefully halted.

The tip of the Wyverntooth Spear pierced Lincoln's skin, but the blade was stopped before it could penetrate deeper.

The ground beneath Michael's feet began to tremor, causing Michael to react instinctively. He retracted the Wyverntooth Spear into the War Rune and retreated several steps.

A quarter of a second after Michael retreated, earthen pillars shot out of the ground. They would have flung Michael through the air with tremendous force if he hadn't stepped back in time.

'Is he losing control like last time? No, it's different. He can still control himself.' Michael concluded while staring straight ahead.

Meanwhile, Lincoln had gotten up from the ground, which he stomped on heavily.

He didn't grow much in height, but he was much heavier than before, and his clothes were torn in dozens of spots after his body expanded in width and breadth.

'Did he turn his flesh and skin into stone?' Michael wondered.

Lincoln's movements were a bit slower than before, but his presence was much more intense. It was almost as if Lincoln became a different person.

'How to break through his defense? Extraction?'

While Michael was trying to grasp how much stronger Lincoln had grown, Lincoln retrieved a set of large gloves from his War Rune.

He calmly put on the gloves that adjusted in size to fit his hand before they began to glow a vivid shade of brown.

The next instant, several stone fists manifested around.

"Lincoln...are you serious right now? Didn't you want to keep the Stone Giant Gloves a secret until the Battle Exchange?" Zeke mumbled, his face full of confusion.

Was Michael really strong enough to force Lincoln to retrieve the Stone Giant Gloves? That shouldn't be the case.

The Stone Giant Gloves were an Epic Tier-2 Artifact set that had been crafted by an Archmaster Enchanter and a Saint Blacksmith. The gloves had been customized to be on par with a Legendary tier-2 Artifact upon triggering the enchantments with the use of Lincoln's Stone Giant Soultrait.

Lincoln had been forced into unleashing the second level of Soul Giant's transformation. The first level was Stone Skin, which transformed Lincoln's skin into a highly endurable hardstone. Meanwhile, the second level was called Expansion, which expanded Lincoln's body in width and breadth by growing Lincoln's Stone-skin.

The grown skin would slowly turn into stone and fall off Lincoln's body. However, until that happened, Lincoln's entire body would be covered in a second layer of highly endurable skin.

Taking the Stone Giant gloves into account, it was quite obvious that Lincoln didn't think about holding back anymore. I think you should take a look at

He considered Michael an opponent, whom he had to fight with all his might.

More than ten stone fists manifested and came flying at Michael at once. Michael's Eagle Eyes were fully unleashed, allowing him to predict their movement paths and evade five stone fists at once. The remaining five stone fists were dealt with by the Wyverntooth Spear. Michael moved rapidly, manifesting the Wyverntooth Spear and coating it with four layers of Enhancement at once.

Even though the energy consumption of a four-layer Enhancement was quite high, Michael could easily destroy the five stone fists before he terminated the use of the four-layer Enhancement. At the same time, he used three enhanced Spirit Whips to lash Lincoln, hoping to distract him.

However, the efficiency of the enhanced Spirit Whips decreased rapidly. Compared to before, the Spirit Whips didn't even inflict half the damage.

Michael tried to keep using Spirit Whips until the mental damage was severe enough to force Lincoln into changing his strategy. However, Lincoln simply manifested a few more stone fists.

The Stone Giant Gloves' glow intensified, and stone walls manifested all around Michael. The walls shot out of the ground, surrounding Michael from every direction except the frontside.

A deep frown appeared on Michael's face. He slashed at the stone walls, just to note that the stone walls were far stronger and more resilient than the earthen pillars Lincoln had manifested before.

'Did his Soultraits grow stronger?'

Michael pinched the bridge of his nose while coming up with his next move. He noticed that he couldn't escape the stone walls easily, and the approaching stone fists weren't easy to deal with either.

Lincoln smiled seeing Michael's expression. However, before he could get a taste of victory, Lincoln's expression changed in a split second.

As Lincoln watched with squinted eyes, Michael's Wyverntooth Spear was suddenly coated in a golden light. Michael shot forward, slashing at the stone fists that crumbled into countless pieces the moment the golden light came in touch with them.

Michael's speed accelerated and his hesitation disappeared. He struck one stone fist after another, destroying all of them without slowing down his burst speed.

He shot forward, and appeared in front of Lincoln while his entire body began to glow in a mixture of intense white and bright gold.

But just before Michael and Lincoln could collide again, a sharp voice rang through the training hall at this moment. It was not loud but everyone in the hall heard the voice ringing through their ears as if someone had been shouted right in their ears.

"How about we stop right here?"

Everyone turned in the direction of the voice instinctively. Michael and Lincoln froze in their tracks as heavy pressure weighed down on them. Their heads turned in the same direction, and their gazes fell upon Silverian Schild, who had just entered the training hall.

Lincoln and Michael terminated their Soultraits without a second thought. Even if they wanted to continue the battle, Silverian Schild's words were a command. He was their instructor, so they were honor bound to obey his orders.

Michael was baffled feeling the heavy pressure suppressing him. It was the first time that he felt such heavy pressure after his last encounter with the mythical serpent. The pressure was as intense as the Thunder Pteranodon King's pressure, which caught Michael off-guard.

'How strong is Silverian Schild?'

"If you guys don't want to stay in the medical hall for a few days you should stop now," Silverian said calmly.

A glint appeared in his eyes as he added, "Or I will make sure that you two will have to stay in the medical hall much longer than a few days. I will gladly help you out!"

Michael was a bit dissatisfied with the abrupt end of their spar. He felt that fighting Lincoln a little longer would have helped him grow stronger. Unfortunately, their battle ended before he could gain more insights about his combat prowess, and how to improve it even further.

"I should have used Enhancement with more precision. Spirit Whip turned useless after a while. It's strong enough to take Lincoln by surprise, but it would need some more strength to knock him out at once..." Michael mumbled to himself, replaying the fight in his mind and trying to figure out what he could have done better.

He walked out of the arena, while still mulling over the same.

'I have good Artifacts, but I cannot unleash their full power properly yet. My Soultraits are powerful but they're not yet perfectly in sync. I cannot use them however I want. Lincoln can focus on one Soultrait

and train it to the extreme. He even amplifies his Soultrait with Artifacts, and his Inheritance technique. Even though he has a 6-Star Soultrait, which is on the same level as Extraction, his Stone Giant Soultrait is far stronger.'

Meanwhile, Lincoln walked back to Zeke, who welcomed him with narrowed eyes.

"I know. Let's not talk about it for now. I'm also trying to figure out what happened," Lincoln told Zeke, who could only nod his head slowly.

"Alright..."

Michael looked over to Zeke and Lincoln, his expression hard to read.

'High Nobles cannot be underestimated. Even if I have a 6-Star Soultrait, I am not yet on par with them. High Nobles have a strong foundation and centuries of experience and research to back them. I won't reach their level within a few months. That is too much to ask for.'

He realized that his foundation was not the same as Lincoln's. However, he also understood that he had the means to reach the same level as Lincoln and the others. All he needed was enough time, and opportunities to make full use of Extraction.

'One step at a time...'

Chapter 238 Error

Michael was not sure how much time they would spend in the Lord Rift. But to be on the safer side, he prepared detailed development plans to survive for several weeks and messaged the Professors and Instructors of his courses that he might not be present for a week or two.

It was unlikely that the Rift would stay open for several weeks, but Michael thought that it was better to be prepared for every possibility.

At last, the last few hours before the Lord Rift would open, elapsed. A faint pulling force manifested in Michael's mind, which he accessed once he double-checked his plans and ensured that everyone knew what they had to do.

Accessing the golden wisp in his mind, Michael got rid of the pulling force in his mind. In response to his action, a golden swirl manifested in front of him. The swirl was the size of a peanut at first. It revolved around its own axis slowly and continued to expand consistently until it reached the size of a mid-sized shuttle.

The golden swirl formed a large ring after it reached its full size, and golden-metallic liquid formed inside the ring.

In less than ten minutes, a golden gate that looked like a more expensive version of the Runic Gate had been manifested in front of Michael, completing the one-way path to the Lord Rift.

Michael, Tiara, and Masked Saber stood in front of the golden gate with mixed emotions. They were excited, ready to harvest countless treasures, and nervous about the unknown dangers they would face soon.

The excitement in their hearts was on the higher side, overwhelming their nervousness easily.

They manifested their Artifacts and gripped their weapons tightly while staring at the golden gate.

"Is everyone ready?" Michael asked, looking left and right to see Tiara and Masked Saber nod their heads.

He took a big stride toward the golden gate, and placed a foot inside as he said, "In that case, let's go!"

Tiara and Masked Saber followed Michael's example. They took a big stride toward the golden gate.

The three took a second stride to step inside the golden gate, which dispersed after the team of three entered it. The golden gate's goal had been fulfilled, leaving no reason for it to continue to exist.

As Michael and his team vanished, Lilica and the others kept staring at the empty spot where the golden gate had been just a moment before. They didn't move for a while as countless thoughts flashed through their minds.

"I know that I'm a little bit late to mention this only now... but isn't Michael a weird Lord?" Liopham asked in an amused voice to the small group of Forest Elves around him.

"Weird? What exactly do you mean?" Lilica asked even though she could guess what Liopham was talking about.

"It's hard to put into words, but why is he growing so fast? His growth-rate is extremely fast, and he has to face much more dangerous situations than most young Lords. His territory manifested in an extremely dangerous location, he has a Soultrait with abilities that I've never even heard of before, and his subjects' Links of Loyalty grow stronger way too fast.

I even noticed that my Link of Loyalty to Michael is growing firmer by the day – even though I don't even think about Michael. And then there is the fact that Michael trusts us way too much," Liopham pointed out, unsure what to think about Michael.

"That's true. If I were in Michael's situation, I wouldn't trust us that much either. We created way too many problems for him to accept us into his territory that easily. Indeed, it's a little weird," Opars agreed, and the others nodded their heads in affirmation.

Even Mika could only agree in shame. He had been the biggest troublemaker for Michael even if he had never intended to do so. It was his mistakes that were the root cause of most problems, yet Michael never complained or punished him. The more Mika thought about it the weirder Michael's actions and train of thought seemed to him.

What was going on in his mind to accept them into his rows that easily? Did Michael think several steps ahead in advance and have the foresight to accept the Forest Elves into his territory for financial gains? Had he already planned to create a new market that can be used to generate great wealth and strengthen his connections with the higher-ups of the Elven race, and his own people?

The EmeraldLeaf Adventurer team wasn't too sure about that anymore. They thought of Michael as a little naïve at first but that had been proven wrong several times by now.

Not only did he think a lot about the course of events, but he had a keen foresight as well. Michael also understood that it was sometimes better to take a step back to stride several steps forward when the perfect opportunity appeared in front of him. I think you should take a look at

"If we're already talking about his Soultrait, don't you think that we owe him big time? Not only did he grant us the ability to fuse with another Soultrait, but he even provided the means to upgrade the Soultraits. No matter how I look at it, we don't really deserve this kind of treatment. After all, our modified Links of Loyalty allow us to leave Michael. We're not exactly permanent members of his territory," Liopham mentioned, causing the other Forest Elves to fall into deep thought.

The Jungle Expedition might have been dangerous warfare, but that didn't mean they deserved to obtain new Soultraits from Michael. They fought for his territory because they wanted to protect their own hideout, and their means to procure low-level armaments for their tribe. Their motives had been selfish to some extent.

"We can think of something to repay Michael later. Let's focus on the production of armaments first. Michael wanted as many agriculture-type blueprints as possible. We should help him out as much as we can!" Lilica remarked, making the final decision for her team.

The Forest Elves began to make their move, ready to fulfill the tasks given by Michael.

Meanwhile, Alice Zenovia stepped out of her Runic Gate and emerged in her office within the Sapphirelake Military Academy.

Her hair was disheveled, and splatters of frozen monster blood covered her clothes. She had dark circles beneath her eyes and looked exhausted as she slumped down into her office chair.

It felt extremely comfortable and caused a heavy sigh of relief to escape her lips subconsciously.

"I should fix my schedule before I forget about it..." She murmured quietly, opening the holographic screen of her crystal watch drowsily.

However, instead of opening her schedule, Alice Zenovia's fingers moved to starnet messengers.

The messenger opened, and her fingers stopped mid-way.

"Wait...what's that?" She mumbled, still half-asleep.

The information that appeared in front of her eyes confused her, forcing Alice to read the messages once again.

"What the hell do you mean with 'delayed'?!? How long?!?" Alice Zenovia cursed in fury, her eyes widening in shock. The sleepiness in her eyes had been wiped away in an instant.

She didn't waste anymore time, and rushed over to the student's dormitory. Simultaneously, she moved to a different chat in starnet messengers, trying to reach Michael before the supercomputer would provide him with the update of the information he had requested.

However, Alice couldn't reach Michael. She was unable to find him in his room either.

He was nowhere to be found.

"Right...he said that he might have to spend a few weeks in the Origin Expanse..." Alice recalled helplessly.

She stared at Michael's empty room, gritting her teeth.

A single word escaped her lips, mirroring the feelings that spread through her entire being.

"FUCK!"

She had been too late and couldn't even tell Michael that there had been an error in the Lord IDs within the Sacred Desert.

[End of Volume 4]

Chapter 239 Countdown

The first thing Michael, Masked Saber and Tiara did upon stepping out of the golden gate was to vomit.

They spend ten minutes emptying their stomachs until there was nothing left inside to throw out.

"That was a hell of a ride," Michael cursed, trying to control his shaking legs.

Entering the Lord Rift by traveling through the golden gate was supposed to be a great experience, but Michael and his companions had the worst experience.

The moment they stepped inside the golden gate they were flung around like ping-pong balls at a professional table tennis match. Even someone with a strong stomach such as Michael couldn't control his body anymore. He could barely hold it in until they stepped out of the golden gate before he fell on his knees and had to empty his stomach the wrong way.

Masked Saber's condition was a bit worse than Michael, but he got better quickly. His issue was just that he had to move away from the rest to remove his mask before he started to vomit. Nobody was allowed to see him, after all.

However, Tiara looked the most miserable. Her hair was disheveled, her tail was stiff like a stick, and she was shivering like a leaf caught in a typhoon.

Almost half an hour passed before she regained her composure.

In the meantime, Michael and Masked Saber looked at their surroundings.

They had emerged in the middle of a small plain patch of land that was void of trees and monsters.

The plains were covered in morning dew, creating an illusion as if stars were twinkling on the ground as the bright sunrays of the morning sun reflected on the grass blades of all sizes.

Even though the grass blades and the morning sun weren't anything special, the star clustered grass field created a certain charm that bewitched everyone observing the scenery around them.

Michael was one of them. He took a deep breath of air, dispersing the nausea caused by the trip to the Lord Rift at once.

The air around them was fresh and filled with origin energy, invigorating the flora and fauna all around them.

'It's even fresher than the Untamed Jungle, and the amount of origin energy permeating the air is both purer and more in quantity as well. This is the perfect place to nurture unique plants, rare treasures, and exotic monsters.' Michael realized, activating Eagle Eyes to look further ahead.

Since there was no obstacle in his way, Michael didn't face any issues scanning through the entirety of the small plains. He didn't see many monsters, but he learned a lot more about the surrounding regions.

They emerged in the center of a small plain that was surrounded by a large forest and a mountain range. The mountain range was ginormous, making it impossible for Michael to see the mountain's upper area, let alone the tip. It spread far across the northern area, creating a natural border.

The forest in the east didn't have many huge trees, but it spread from the eastern side of the plains all over to the south. A wide variety of trees could be found, and Michael even knew some of them since they were quite rare and hard to nurture.

"Not far from here is a large town, but it seems to have been abandoned a long time ago. Nature regained ownership of the land that has been taken from it for quite a while. Moss covers the buildings and dense vegetation has grown inside the artificial structures, destroying them from within," Michael pointed out after he told Masked Saber and Tiara about the regions surrounding them.

With Eagle Eyes he could see much further than anyone else – with great detail at that.

"We'll probably encounter more Lords in the town since everyone will be looking for treasures there. Should we focus on searching for invaluable plants and ores using your Soultrait in the forest and the mountain range, or do you want to face our opponents immediately?" Masked Saber asked after he digested the information he had obtained.

Within rifts, man-made constructions were always a sign of invaluable treasures. It was common knowledge that the Will of the Origin Expanse would use cities and all kinds of other constructions to hide heavenly treasures. That way, it was easy to find the presumable location of the treasures, which led to bloody battles. I think you should take a look at

The Lord Rift had opened less than an hour ago, but it was likely that several Lords had already found their way to the abandoned town.

Thinking about what to do, Michael saw a white wisp conjuring in front of him. The wisp entered his mind through his forehead, transferring vital information straight to his mind.

Every Lord who had entered the Lord Rift was given all necessary information about the Lord Rift.

[Welcome to the Lord Rift, dear Lords. 100 Lords entered the Lord Rift during the 242nd Rift opening. Congratulations!]

[You'll be given a one-time opportunity to collect invaluable treasures, obtain unique loot from defeating your opponents, and various valuable materials that can be found all over the isolated dimension in the next 100 hours. After the countdown hits zero, you'll be thrown out of the Lord Rift, whether you're alive or not.]

[Remark 1: The countdown can be accessed with a mere thought.

Remark 2: The Will of the Origin Expanse will reward the surviving Lords after the Lord Rift closes. Their actions and contribution in the battle for survival inside the isolated dimension will be taken into consideration, and an appropriate reward will be granted.

Remark 3: Everything collected in the Lord Rift will drop upon dying.]

The voice entering his mind was ethereal and gender-neutral. It sounded like the voice of a man at one point but switched to a higher frequency until Michael realized that there was not only one voice. There were dozens of overlapping voices.

However, Michael was more focused on the content the ethereal voice forwarded than trying to decipher who it belonged to. The pieces of information he and the other Lords received were pretty helpful, providing just enough to know what to do to leave the Lord Rift with as many benefits as possible.

"Actions and contribution in the battle of survival will determine the rewards given after the Lord Rift closes. That can be interpreted in many ways;" Michael murmured before averting his attention to something more important, "100 hours...that's much shorter than I expected. That only means the fight for the treasures inside the abandoned town will be even fiercer. The pressure weighing on the Lords will force them to move as soon as possible."

Even Michael felt a little bit pressured by the short amount of time they'd been given in the Lord Rift. If he had more time, he wouldn't have a problem spending most time inside the forest and mountain range using Extraction to harvest rare ores from deep underground, and collecting unique plants and herbs that cannot be found easily outside the Lord Rift.

But the crucial point was the third remark made by the ethereal voice stating that everything collected in the Lord Rift will drop upon dying.

"If killing others will reward me with all their loot, I don't really have to rush. Most Lords, who've gotten a taste of the Lord Rift's treasures will desire to obtain more. They'll hunt others to plunder their corpses instead of working hard to gather treasures on their own. That intensifies the fierceness of the battles in the Lord Rift even further, especially closer to the end of the 100-hour period. Not many Lords should be focusing on harvesting plants, herbs, and ores," Michael strategized, which attracted Tiara and Masked Saber's attention.

"How about we spend the first three days collecting information and harvesting materials in the forest and the mountain range before moving over to assaulting and assassinating other Lords? That way, we have the rare materials from the Lord Rift, in addition to the treasures dropped by the Lords we killed," Masked Saber suggested, indicating that he was ready to hunt other Lords at any time.

Meanwhile, Tiara was a lot calmer. She listened to the information Michael forwarded and tried to come up with a proper plan to make the most gains.

"Rifts are always filled with plants, trees, and ores that need lots of nutrients and origin energy to form and grow. If we're focusing on harvesting materials, we might be able to find the missing ingredients to complete a teleportation array or upgrade the Summoning Gate to the intermediate rank. I think we should avoid other Lords for the time being. After all, we don't want to sustain heavy injuries so early in the quest. We don't have someone with a healing Soultrait by our side, and potions are not omnipotent," She pointed out, which received the approval of the others.

"So harvesting and avoiding Lords it is?" Michael asked before pointing toward the south, "Because I doubt that we'll be able to avoid the monsters in the Lord Rift." His subordinates nodded to that and their gazes followed his pointed finger to see that far away from their position, a group of monsters was pacing through the plains.

They held their heads high to get a whiff of the scent that filled the air.

The monsters turned in Michael's direction and began to charge.

"Prepare for battle. We have to deal with a bunch of Werewolves!"

Chapter 240 Superior Existence

Michael manifested Zark and the Typhern Leather Armor Set after he told Tiara and Masked Saber about the upcoming fight.

Masked Saber retrieved his newly forged black saber, while Tiara manifested her Artifacts. Her silver spear appeared in front of Tiara. She grasped it and spun it around her body playfully.

Thinking hard about something was not her style. Tiara was much better off by using the simple approach to deal with problems appearing in front of her.

To Tiara, problems she couldn't see didn't exist, in the first place. Sometimes that might seem foolish, and even reckless, but it made her life much easier since she didn't have to rake her brain to deal with stuff that may not even happen.

Meanwhile, Michael observed the rapidly approaching Werewolves intently. They were still quite far away, but Michael could make out a few interesting facts.

'Given their rapid speed and the fact that they could smell us from several kilometers away, they're definitely Tier-2 Monsters – probably Low-stage Tier....'

Michael felt that something was odd about the Werewolves, whose bodies were covered in silver scales instead of fur. A large white horn juts out of their foreheads as well.

They looked like expensive statues made of silver and marble rather than fearsome monsters. However, the bloodlust Michael detected in their eyes was a clear indicator of their fierceness.

Without wasting any time, Michael used Enhancement on Zark before manifesting an ordinary energy-condensed arrow. He pulled the bowstring back and aimed high in the air. Michael tweaked it a little before he released the arrow that cut through the air in a beautiful arc.

It impacted hard upon the designated target with a loud smack that reached his ears.

However, the arrowhead didn't even pierce through the target's scales. It was repelled and fell silently to the ground.

The Horned Werewolves were undeterred by the sudden attack and continued their approach, rapidly closing the distance to Michael's group.

Michael and his group was outnumbered by one. The Horned Werewolves were four in total, and they spread out to surround their targets.

Tiara and Masked Saber began to move as well. Tiara released her Soultrait to unleash a sudden burst of energy that boosted her ahead. In an instant, she reached her top speed.

With great momentum, Tiara shot toward the closest Horned Werewolf, which was to her left.

Meanwhile, Masked Saber covered the black saber in a thick layer of silver energy. The silver energy condensed a second blade around the saber, enhancing the weapon's sharpness drastically. He was just about to move ahead when white wisps shrouded the silver energy, which further enhanced the silver energy's potency.

Michael had used two-layer Enhancement on Masked Saber's silver energy to ensure that his comrade's weapon would be able to cut through the scales and flesh of the Horned Werewolves.

Simultaneously, Michael applied two more layers of Enhancement on Zark. He manifested the strongest energy-condensed arrow and pulled the bowstring back. But, he didn't release the arrow immediately. Instead of rushing anything, he waited patiently until the first Horned Wolf entered the range of 100 meters around him.

Streams of golden light burst out of Michael, extracting small bits of the earth beneath the closest Horned Werewolf. He didn't extract much, allowing him to complete his small trick instantaneously. The Horned Werewolf only realized what happened when one of its paws was stuck in a 20-centimeter-deep hole. I think you should take a look at

Using its tremendous strength, the Horned Werewolf could easily escape the small hole, bursting the loose ground around the hole and freeing itself. However, the monster lost its speed and momentum in the process. The Horned Werewolf was forced to remain in the same position for nearly a whole second – providing Michael with more than enough time to adjust Zark a little, and release the strongest energy arrow.

The arrow gained tremendous velocity the moment it was released. It crossed 100 meters near instantly and drilled deep in the wide-open mouth of the Horned Werewolf. The Horned Werewolf had been howling loudly to communicate with its comrades, warning them about their opponents' dirty tricks.

But before the Horned Werewolf could finish the warning, an arrow with terrific velocity shot into its mouth, and pierced outside through the back of the mouth.

The Horned Werewolf howled in pain, however, Michael's attack was not over. The strongest energy arrow burst apart once it lost its momentum.

The energy explosion ruptured the Horned Wolves' mouth, creating a gaping hole in its mouth and cruelly shredding its throat, leaving bits of bone and flesh holding it together somehow. That was enough to turn the severe injury inflicted by the impact of the arrow into a lethal blow that would end the Horned Werewolves' life in the next few seconds.

A fountain of blood gushed out of the gaping hole, covering the silver scales with hot, crimson blood.

The Horned Werewolf didn't expect to die like this. It shot toward Michael, in the hopes of dragging him down to hell as well. However, Michael diverted his attention. He created two Spirit Whips with which he lashed out at the injured Horned Werewolf. Weakened and in distress, the injured Horned Werewolf didn't even realize that it had been struck with a mental attack before it was already too late.

The Horned Werewolf's sight blurred and it slumped to the ground after the Spirit Whips lashed on its mind. It tried to get up from the ground but the strength in its legs was deteriorating rapidly. The Horned Werewolf could only lift one of its arms in hopes of reaching Michael and ripping out his throat. But it was too weak. The last bits of strength escaped the Horned Werewolf's body.

The Horned Werewolf slumped to the ground with a thud, the life in his eyes slowly dispersing. Its body writhed two more times before the Horned Werewolf stopped moving completely.

"One down, three to go," Michael mumbled, pulling back the bowstring smoothly.

Using Enhancement on Zark increased the bow's pulling force as well. Fortunately, Michael could barely deal with the pulling force of Zark after a three-layer Enhancement had been applied to Zark.

An ordinary energy arrow condensed on Zark's bowstring, which Michael released without hesitation. The arrow whizzed through the air, colliding with the next closest Horned Werewolves' claw. The Horned Werewolf had been about to claw Masked Saber in the back. Michael intervened just in time and prevented that, fortunately. He manifested a few more energy arrows and released them one by one.

His accuracy and firing speed were both impeccable and exceptional enough to hit all targets while releasing three arrows in less than two seconds.

The Horned Werewolf was struck thrice in the arm and once in the neck. None of the arrows pierced deep into the Werewolf's scales, but they weren't repelled either. The force Michael applied to the arrows was more than enough to cause severe damage to most Lowest-stage Tier-2 Monsters. However, it was barely enough to drill into the Horned Werewolf's scales and got stuck inside.

The constant barrage of arrows enraged the Horned Werewolf. It prevented the Werewolf from attacking Masked Saber several times and caused the monster's attack to grow more relentless.

And that was the moment Masked Saber had been waiting for.

He turned around, the silver energy engulfing his saber pulsating vividly.