

Supreme Lord 31

Chapter 31 Golden Bartholomew

Back in Bartholomew's House of Witchery, a bald middle-aged man broke out in a sweat as he bowed several times to Michael.

"Thank you, Sir... Thank you so much!" He expressed his gratitude repeatedly, "The House of Witchery would have been ruined without you!!"

The bald middle-aged man was the manager of the House of Witchery, who came rushing to his shop when he heard what happened.

"There is no need to exaggerate," Michael murmured to himself in a muffled voice. He stepped forward to pat the manager's shoulder in hope of stopping the man from bowing again.

"It's fine. I acted because of the little boy, not to protect the shop."

Michael didn't really like bootlickers, and he was certainly not one himself. Thus, he pointed out the facts bluntly rather than making it seem like he had protected the little boy for the shop's sake.

"Of course of course. It was all for the boy..." The manager said hurriedly. He wiped the sweat from his forehead before he bowed once again, "But your actions protected the prestige of the shop, nonetheless. Frederik Kolbenheim and Jacqueline Orlando are known for stirring trouble and breaking things. Everyone knows them, but you took action despite that!"

"...Okay."

"It would be too shrewd of me, if I wouldn't reward you for acting when nobody else did. Seeing your selfless action, I feel a little generous today. You saved the shop today from getting destroyed, so I might as well reach deep in my pockets to thank the savior of our prestigious shop!" The manager gave him a proud smile before he snapped his fingers.

A staff member rushed to the manager from farther away upon hearing the snap. He was carrying a pair of leather boots in his hands which he held out for Michael to take. Simultaneously, a golden card with the logo of Bartholomew appeared in the manager's hand.

"To express my gratitude, I would like to reward you with the Boots of Taran, and the Golden Bartholomew Membership. With the membership, you'll be able to use all facilities affiliated to Bartholomew. Furthermore, we will always use the highest possible price to purchase your goods and provide a discount whenever you purchase something!"

Michael stared at the manager with a stupefied expression for a while. He felt the gaze of dozens lingering on him, while the manager stared intently into his eyes as well.

'You won't let me leave if I don't take all of this, will you?' Michael thought with a wry smile on his lips as he accepted the gifts. "That's very generous of you. Thank you!"

He accepted the membership card along with the Boots of Taran while his mind began to rattle.

'He is genuinely thankful for what I did, but the staff seems a little stupefied,' Michael perceived with a single glance across the room, 'Is he trying to please me to turn me into a repeat customer to use all the Bartholomew facilities? Sorry, but I am just a normal guy, and not a bigshot. Your investment is not worth it.'

Despite thinking like that, Michael felt that the manager was a sly man. Granting him various benefits inevitably improved his business relationship with the shop.

It was only obvious, but Michael would keep visiting it since he was promised discounts for all purchases and high prices whenever he wanted to sell something. Furthermore, with the rewards he was given, the House of Witchery's image would improve on the outside as well. Word would spread that they're not stingy when it comes to rewarding those who stand up for others when nobody else does. It would improve the shop's public image and goodwill by rewarding their 'savior' for his actions.

"The Boots of Taran is a Tierless 2-Star Artifact with an enchantment. It won't increase your physical strength or agility drastically upon binding to your War Rune, but you will be able to use the enchantment called 'Swiftiness'. Winds will gather around the boots to increase your speed by decreasing your weight slightly," The young man explained with a subtle smile.

Meanwhile, the bald manager received a call. One moment he was happy, and the next, his face was drained of its colour.

"I am terribly sorry, but I will have to leave," The bald manager said before bowing to Michael, "Once again, thank you very much. I hope you'll have a nice shopping trip!"

After bidding goodbye to Michael, the bald manager whispered something to the staff member next to him. He ran away afterward and disappeared a few seconds later.

'What now? The deal?'

Michael smiled lightly while scratching the back of his head and turned back to the clerk from earlier.

"Can we adjust the price according to the rates I would receive with the Golden Bartholomew Membership, please?" He asked the clerk.

The clerk nodded his head immediately, "Of course, Sir...but please don't misunderstand...I gave you the best rates for ordinary customers. However, since you've become a member of the Golden Bartholomew the rate changes a little..."

The clerk didn't want Michael to think that he dupped him earlier when he promised the best price.

"I understand, don't worry," Michael replied calmly.

That was enough for the clerk to sigh in relief and get back to work.

In the following minutes, Michael waited patiently before he received a new contract.

"The Golden Bartholomew membership card is also connected to a separate bank account. The annual interest rate is 3%. Do you wish to transfer the money to your Golden Bartholomew membership card, or to your private bank account, Sir?" The clerk asked at last.

"You can transfer it to the membership card. I will use up most of it in the next few minutes, either way," Michael answered nonchalantly. The clerk smiled lightly in response and gave him a nod. "As you wish, Sir!"

The clerk retrieved Michael's Golden Bartholomew card before asking a few questions. Michael answered all of them to link his ID to the Golden Bartholomew before he received two notifications on his crystal watch.

[The Pandemonium Bartholomew Bank has been successfully linked.]

[50,630\$ have been transferred to your account!]

'Huh?! Over 50,000 dollars? Isn't that a little too much?' Michael's eyes widened in shock.

He knew that a Low Tier-1 Monster corpse was worth roughly 500\$, but that included their meat, organs, and bones. Michael hadn't brought any meat and he didn't have enough space to squeeze all monster bones and organs inside his War Rune either. Despite that, he had earned 50,000\$. That was insane!!

"The hide and Gemstones of Gem Jaguars are valuable because they're hard to procure without damaging them. Gem Jaguars are also pretty hard to find. The Gemstones you sold were in perfect condition, just like the Frenzy Dear Antlers and everything else you sold. It will be quite easy to work with the materials you've provided, which is why the Shop's AI gave your goods a high evaluation score," The clerk said when he noticed Michael staring stupefied at the notification on his crystal watch.

"Oh, nice..." Michael blurted out after listening half-heartedly. His mind was still processing the fact that he had earned so much in such a short amount of time.

For a moment, he forgot that he was in a rush, and he continued to stare blankly at his crystal watch.

Only when he felt someone pulling at his sleeve did Michael regain his senses. He looked to his right where a female staff member was waiting for him. She stared at him with a smile and bowed lightly when he finally took note of her.

"The manager told me to guide you around the shop. If you like something, just say the word!"

Michael could only nod his head before his shopping trip began.

Ten minutes later, he left the shop with a grave expression.

'Why did I think that I was rich? I am dirt poor...'

Chapter 32 Attack

It was not yet 4 pm when Michael entered the shuttle to get back home.

His expression was still dazed and filled with disbelief, and it took a while before he regained his composure.

'Why did I ever believe that 50,000\$ is a lot?'

He had only been shopping for a short while, but Michael wanted to cry after looking at his now-empty bank account. Most of his savings had been exhausted as well. He had used up his hard-earned money in a fraction of the time it took him to earn it.

'A bunch of potions, arrows, two mass-produced basic techniques used by soldiers, and a low-quality enchantment array is all I can afford...that's ridiculous...I couldn't even buy the Low Elite Arrow Artifact with the Return enchantment...'

He bought a bunch of miscellaneous items such as bandages, mattresses, and other necessities to improve his subjects' lifestyle quickly, but these goods were cheap compared to the other things he purchased.

The most expensive purchases were the Sun Soldier Breathing technique, the Sun Soldier's Weaponry technique, and the preservation enchantment array of low quality. Other than that, the potions were also not that cheap. However, their use was exceptional, so his expenditure didn't sting that much.

'To think that a mass-produced basic technique cost 10,000\$. They're not even amazing techniques...' He grumbled even though he knew that he was already very lucky with the items in stock. Few shops were able to get their hands on the techniques he purchased.

The Sun Soldier's Breathing technique improved the user's stamina, while simultaneously improving the absorption rate of the Origin Expanse's dormant energy. It was one of the techniques that required lots of practice to be mastered rather than high talent.

The same could be said about the Sun Soldier's Weaponry technique. It taught the most fundamental points about various weapons, which made it easier for a starless summon to learn how to fight.

Instead of purchasing Combat Summoning Scrolls for a hefty price to summon a random combat unit, Michael chose the two basic techniques to train his subjects. He didn't want to force them to fight, instead, Michael wanted to give his subjects the opportunity to become stronger and fend for themselves if necessary.

Most of his subjects were starless and they would probably never be able to receive enlightenment and be able to break through the limit of their potential. Nonetheless, Michael wanted to give them a chance to change their fate.

This was something few Lords did because they deemed it useless, but Michael was different. He had a huge advantage compared to them.

His Soultrait made it easier to obtain summoning scrolls. He received summoning scroll fragments from every monster killed by him or his subjects. Extraction increased his drop rate for other loot as well.

For someone like Michael, purchasing summoning scrolls was a waste of money. Instead, he should exploit the utility of his Soultrait as much as possible. Training his subjects was one way to achieve this.

As long as one out of a hundred starless summons was able to be promoted to a 1-Star Soldier through the techniques he purchased, it would already be worth it for Michael. With enough time and effort, a small but capable army would form. That was something Michael believed firmly!

'If 50,000\$ is not enough to purchase everything, I can just work harder and earn more!'

Michael's internal conflict died down slowly and he was filled with determination again.

After he overcame the initial shock, he finally understood why most Lords said that they could never have enough money. There were always expenses that had to be covered, draining the money one earned over a long period rapidly.

'Just give your best and focus!' He told himself as the shuttle descended to land in front of the apartment complex.

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

He got out, entered the apartment complex, and returned home with a glint in his eyes.

His mind had been dazzled by the tremendous amount of money a Lord required to properly build and grow his territory. Fortunately, he didn't require too much time to get back to his old self, and the tiredness that was about to engulf him dispersed as he regained his composure.

Michael was back in his apartment and ready to return to the Origin Expanse to strive even harder than before!

"Do I have everything?" He mumbled before checking his War Rune three more times.

Only when he was certain that he had bought everything necessary did he will the War Rune to open the Runic Gate once again.

The space in front of him distorted and the white Gate manifested. Michael didn't waste a second and stepped through the Gate immediately.

A few seconds later, the Runic Gate manifested in the clearing of his territory and Michael stepped outside.

The first thing he did was to check his Links of Loyalty. None of them had been cut nor had they grown weaker.

'Everyone is still alive, good.'

Once he was reassured about that, he looked into the sky and noticed that rays of sunlight were shining through the canopy of ginormous trees.

It meant he had arrived in the Origin Expanse shortly after sunrise, just like Michael guessed.

'Where is Tiara?' Michael wondered as he looked out for the Battle Maid. She shouldn't be too far away, but Michael couldn't find her.

'Well, whatever. I can search for her once I rescue our idiotic Tracker.'

Michael walked over to the wooden manor and entered Blaire Tracer's room. She was lying in the bed, looking deathly pale and sweating profusely.

He took in a breath of the cold air and rushed to her bed. With a flick of his wrist, a vial with viscous red liquid appeared in his hand. Michael removed the lid quickly and lifted Blaire's head gently before he held the bottle near her mouth. The viscous content of the bottle trickled into her mouth, but there was no reaction from Blaire's side.

Michael waited patiently; however, Blaire was unmoving. In fact, if not for her weak breathing, Michael wouldn't be able to tell that she was still alive.

That was a bad sign.

'Should I give her another potion?' He pondered a bit but shook his head at last. Healing potions were infused with lifeforce to aid the injured's healing process. Providing a severely injured patient with too much lifeforce without processing it in specific ways might be counter-productive and cause unwanted results.

'I didn't expect her condition to deteriorate that quickly...I should have purchased other potions for her...' Michael could take the risk, but he knew that the unrefined healing potions in his possession were not the best. They were cost-efficient, but not able to resurrect someone who was on his or her death's bed. Even selling his entire territory wouldn't be enough to afford such a potion.

Thus, all he could do was hope that Blaire's body would react to the potions he purchased and accept them.

Michael sighed deeply in regret and put Blaire back down in bed. He called one of his subjects over and handed her a few potions, clean bandages and ethanol to disinfect her wound.

"Take care of her. Give her another potion if her condition doesn't improve in the next 30 minutes. If she stays like this until lunch, give her another healing potion" Michael ordered, "Report to me when her condition gets worse."

"I understand, my Lord!" The woman said immediately. She opened her mouth afterward but shut it a moment later. Michael noticed that and halted in his tracks.

"If you have a problem, just tell me," He said, sensing that something was amiss.

The woman hesitated, unsure if she was eligible to report to their lord. Only when she saw the impatience and concern in Michael's eyes did her lips part subconsciously and words tumbled out.

"My lord, I am not sure if you've already received the report but...the beings you called Gogis have started to attack the protection barrier with the rise of the sun..."

"Already?!"

Chapter 33 Soaked

"Already?!" Michael asked, a little surprised but he calmed down quickly.

He had expected the Gogis to attack after he returned, and not before sunrise. Fortunately, their attacks were not his immediate concern because the protection barrier was still intact. It would take a little bit more to destroy the protection barrier than some Tier-1 Gogis.

"Where is Tiara?" He asked the woman, who was about to reply when a weak, hardly comprehensible voice rang through the room.

"Fighting the Gogis..." Blaire Tracer replied in the woman's stead. She forced her eyes to open just a bit and look at her Lord, "...sorry..."

Michael looked over to Blaire with furrowed eyebrows. He didn't expect Blaire to be up because the healing potion had been less efficient on her than he had expected. However, it was good to see that her mentality was quite strong.

"It's good that you woke up, but focus on getting better," He told Blaire. Afterward, he turned to the woman standing next to Blaire's bed and instructed, "Please take care of her."

Wasting no time, Michael rushed out of the room and the wooden manor. He was not sure about Tiara's exact position but dashing to the border of the protection barrier where most noises came from was the best bargain.

It took no time for him to reach the border to his territory and a Battle Maid from the Silverfang Tigerfolk, who looked like she had taken a bath in crimson blood.

Her ears twitched in excitement and her tail wagged from left to right as she threw the corpse of a large Gorilla-like monster on top of a small pile of corpses.

There were, at least, ten Gogi corpses thrown haphazardly at each other, forming the small mountain. Each of them was roughly 2.5 meters tall with a great physique that had been trained to the peak. The Gogi were extremely bulky, to the extent that one might question whether they got steroids for all three meals of the day. In addition to that, long, black hair covered their entire body.

'Yetis should look similar,' Michael thought at first glance. He then turned over to Tiara, who began to smile brightly upon seeing him. She rushed over to him, her ears perking upward and her tail curling up.

"Master, you've returned!" Tiara exclaimed, bowing deeply. "I dealt with some of them!!!"

"...I can see that...Good job, Tiara," Michael appreciated her efforts while giving her a forced smile. Tiara was only 1.6 meters tall, but she carried around the Gogi corpses as if they didn't weigh anything.

'She is not injured either. That's the most important,' He thought while glancing at Tiara, who was excited, 'Looks like the Silverfang Tigerfolk is quite powerful, or is it just Tiara? No, she seems excited to be able to fight instinctively. Is everyone from the Silverfang Tigerfolk a warrior? ... It would be great to have them here then...'

Michael was in dire need of powerful warriors, but it was not as if he could snap and the Silverfang Tigerfolk would gather in his territory.

The spot he was currently in was well secured and the protection barrier was hidden from the dense flora and fauna of the rainforest. As he was deep in thought, Michael took a while to notice until he heard the loud thuds that were coming from the protection barrier. And when he did, his curiosity was piqued, and he moved around to look behind the thicket.

What appeared in front of him were close to 30 2.5-meter-tall Gogis towering behind the protection barrier, throwing spears and stones at the barrier from two dozen meters.

"After I killed some of them, they retreated. I cannot reach them anymore – not if I don't want to sustain severe injuries in the process." Tiara explained, feeling slightly disappointed, and her ears drooped.

"It doesn't look like they'll leave anytime soon either. You did a good job hunting ten Gogis without sustaining any injuries," Michael acknowledged her efforts before he added, "How much energy do you have left?"

Michael used his Eagle Eyes to collect all the necessary information. He then hid behind the thicket while retrieving the 1-Star Tierless Antler Bow.

'If they stay here, I won't be able to hunt properly. Their attacks will stagnate my progress...' He thought before another thought flashed through his mind, 'The more Gogis I hunt right now, the fewer opponents will I have to face once I clash with their leader!'

Tiara's ears perked up again upon hearing the praise. Her grip on the silver spear tightened and she was about to turn around to return to the battlefield. She was extremely motivated and wanted to receive more praise from her master when Michael suddenly threw something in her direction.

"Bind them to your War Rune. The boots have a passive enchantment that drains a bit of energy every few seconds. In exchange, you will have an easier time maneuvering through the rainforest, and evading attacks," Michael summarized the effect of the Boots of Taran after he handed them to Tiara.

She had a War Rune and should thus be able to bind Artifacts.

Tiara didn't tell him how much energy she had left but he was able to make a rough guess seeing how excited she was and feeling their strengthened Link of Loyalty.

"Are you sur—..." Tiara began, only to see that Michael's attention had already diverted to binding the Antler Bow to his War Rune.

Now that his strength and refinement increased a little, he could bind another Artifact to his War Rune. Tigerfang enhanced his Agility, Strength, and perception. As an Epic Artifact, the enhancement was drastic, which was not the case for the 1-Star Tierless Antler Bow.

It enhanced his perception a little, but that was already it, which was an advantage. Michael didn't want to burden his body too much with the artificial enhancement he received from Artifacts because his body was already under a lot of stress from the toll of his refined War Rune.

His body had yet to fully adjust to the War Rune's refinement degree increasing at a rapid pace within the first three days it manifested.

Unfortunately, Michael didn't have enough time to fool around and adapt to the changes inside his body. He was in a dangerous territory and one of the Lords near his territory was already hostile to him. Michael had to deal with the issues at hand before he could pay attention to his body and other needs.

Meanwhile, Tiara bound the Boots of Taran to her War Rune and put them on. Their size increased slightly after she summoned them from her War Rune, fitting her feet perfectly.

"Are you confident that you're nimble enough to evade the stones and spears thrown at you?" Michael asked seriously.

Tiara looked at him for a second or two before she nodded her head, "I can use the surrounding environment to block most attacks. Their attack pattern is nothing special, either. I won't have a problem getting closer to them. The only issue is close combat. Once I reach them, I won't be able to deal with all of them at the same time, Master."

"There is no need for you to enter close combat until the end," Michael revealed mysteriously.

"I don't have to do that? Did you already come up with a plan, master?"

The glint in Tiara's eyes intensified upon hearing that Michael had a plan, and her eyes widened upon seeing what emerged in front of her a moment later.

"That is your plan, master? Amazing!"

Chapter 34 Survival Of The Fittest

Michael's plan was pretty simple; he would poison the Gogis.

Since he was weaker than the Gogis, and he had only one ally by his side, Michael deemed it necessary to be fully prepared for the Gogis' attack.

He didn't have enough funds to purchase lethal poison with the effect of killing powerful opponents, but his savings, combined with the little money he had to spare from his first income as a Lord had been enough to purchase a simple poison that attacked the nervous system of the affected, paralyzing the victim for a few minutes.

It was like a narcotic, just a tad weaker and easier to use.

Michael could only purchase a single bottle of the paralyzing poison with his meager funds but that had to be enough.

"Gogis are dense, and their attacks are simple. If you can keep them distracted for a few minutes, the tide of the battle will turn in our favor," Michael said before he began to elaborate the plan he had in mind, sharing more details.

Tiara listened intently and nodded every few seconds.

Two minutes later, she dashed through the thicket and emerged outside the protection barrier. Her eyes moved from left to right before she kicked on the ground. Tiara darted to the left and the heads of all Gogis followed her movements at once.

The Gogis picked up their spears and stones and threw them with full might at the detestable target. However, before any projectiles could hit her, Tiara disappeared behind a humongous tree.

She reappeared on the other side a moment later, only to vanish into the nearby bush, confusing the Gogis. In the following 60 seconds, Tiara kept the group of 30 Gogis fully distracted. Their heads flicked in Tiara's direction, and the only time their focus wavered was the second they took to pick up new projectiles to throw at the Battle Maid.

The Gogis forgot about the protection barrier and kept attacking Tiara. Upon noticing that their projectiles were useless, some Gogis began to charge at Tiara.

It was only a moment later when it happened.

A loud thud resounded through the area, which was immediately followed by the crisp sound of rustling leaves. The Gogis were too engrossed in cornering Tiara so even if they heard the sound, they were already focused on the target ahead of them. They didn't want to give their target an opportunity to escape now that she had left the protection barrier. She had killed too many of their comrades to be kept alive!

Thus, they ignored the continuous sound of thuds and rustling leaves and only looked up when their brethren roared out in anger.

The Gogis turned around, only to halt in their tracks upon seeing that six of their brethren were lying on the ground, spiked with several arrows.

More arrows flew through the air, hitting another target three times in quick succession. After the first arrow hit the target, the Gogi stumbled. However, only after the second and third arrow impacted did it collapse.

They were not yet dead, but their combat prowess had been nullified by Michael who paralyzed them for the next few minutes.

All of that was thanks to the poison-coated arrows Michael shot at his targets.

He was standing on a tree branch high up in the air, dozens of meters away from the Gogis. Michael had left the protection barrier earlier to find a better position to attack the Gogis secretly.

He could locate his opponents quite easily from his position with his Eagle Eyes while the Gogis didn't have such an ability. Furthermore, their tracking skills were not exactly exceptional either.

"One of my people stole your Bilroxs' eggs, but you attacked my territory. We started it first, but that doesn't mean I'll allow you to hunt me down!" Michael mumbled to himself as he coated the next three arrows in the bottle of paray poison.

Initially, Michael wanted to grow his territory inside the protection barrier first. He had too few subjects and missed out on a vast pool of information about the surrounding area and the Overlords of the rainforest by staying confined to his territory. Unfortunately, it seemed like the Origin Expanse wasn't going to be merciful enough to give him enough time to build his territory.

The Gogis had a good reason to attack him, but it was not as if Michael would allow them to destroy everything. They were stupid and already fully focused on Tiara.

They didn't even realize that someone else had already sneaked up on them and believed that Tiara had unleashed some sorcery to attack from a different angle. They didn't see a second person, which meant that there was no second person – obviously.

Michael chuckled when he realized that the Gogis were not even trying to find him. Their eyes kept following Tiara as the Battle Maid continued to run around and distract them. She closed the distance

between herself and the Gogis every now and then before diving deeper in the rainforest's thicket, evading several projectiles easily.

His movements were graceful and nimble. It was easy to tell that she had been trained meticulously and that her body was well-balanced, able to discharge tremendous strength through every single muscle fiber in her body without adversely affecting her flexibility.

Michael observed the battlefield intently in the meantime. He finished coating the next batch of arrows and nocked the first on the bowstring. He pulled the bowstring back when most of the Gogis were focused on Tiara and aimed.

However, he didn't release the arrow immediately as a doubt flashed through his mind.

'Three arrows are enough to paralyze them, but is it really alright to leave them alive?'

He noticed that some Gogis had finally diverted their focus from Tiara to help their injured comrades. They dragged their comrades over the ground and away from her, increasing the distance to both the protection barrier and Tiara.

They were moving closer to Michael's position but that didn't change the fact that the Gogi seemed fiercely loyal and had an extreme sense of unity.

'If I leave them alive, they'll be able to flee...by the time I face the Gogi Lord I will have to face more enemies, who're thirsting for my blood...'

He looked at the Gogi he had targeted earlier, grit his teeth, and changed his target. The next moment, his arrow aimed at one of the Gogis who was trying to pull his comrade out of the danger zone. Then Michael released the arrow and observed as it flew towards its target.

Shivers ran down his spine and goosebumps spread all over his body as his eyes followed the arrow's trajectory precisely. It was almost as if time had slowed down as the arrow pierced the Gogi's head, precisely shooting through its ear, and penetrating the brain.

The Gogi was not even able to utter a sound as it collapsed on the ground and died at once.

Michael retched after witnessing the devastating damage a single precise arrow could cause and tear his opponent. He felt like vomiting but forced his stomach to calm down and swallowed the bile rising in his throat.

He was a little bit disgusted with himself even now, but Michael understood that strength meant everything.

Murder was not nice, that was for sure. However, killing the opponents who wanted to see him dead was a necessity if he wanted to survive.

The Origin Expanse was a cruel game of survival of the fittest. Being merciful to those who wished to see him dead would lead to more problems.

He couldn't spare the lives of his opponents, or he would be the next to die.

'Get your fucking act together! It's either you or them!!!'

Chapter 35 Control

In the next 20 minutes, Michael and Tiara killed 18 Gogis.

The remaining Gogis retreated unwillingly after a loud honk resounded through the rainforest. If not for the honk, the Gogis would have continued to throw themselves at Tiara and their paralyzed comrades to rescue them.

However, whenever they got near their paralyzed comrades, the Gogis ended up under fire. They were either killed at once or paralyzed by a series of arrows that impacted in quick succession.

Leaving behind their paralyzed brethren was even worse than death to the Gogis. Their anguished roars of helplessness could be heard for a long time, but neither Tiara nor Michael let that fool them.

There had to be a leader in the group of Gogis, commanding them with certain sounds, such as the honking of a horn that forced them to retreat. If not for that, the Gogis would have sacrificed themselves one after another. That was how loyal they were to their comrades!

'Either the leader is as dense as the other Gogis in the group, or he arrived just now... It could have been a scout as well instead of a leader...' Michael thought, unsure about the Gogi race's military hierarchy and structure. He knew some things about Gogis, but he was not an expert.

Their denseness, stubbornness, and camaraderie were apparent, but other than that, Michael couldn't really tell much.

Now that the Gogis retreated, there was no need to keep the hostages around anymore. Michael retrieved a few more arrows from his War Rune's storage and nocked the first on the bowstring. He pulled the bowstring back, lifted the bow, and readied his aim for two seconds. Then he shot.

The arrow dug deep into the head of the paralyzed target, killing it. Michael fought against the disgust that spread through his entire being and nocked the second arrow on the bowstring.

Seven arrows later, the paralyzed Gogis were dead, and a massive energy influx flooded Michael's War Rune. The pace of refinement of his War Rune shot up to a high degree and Michael could immediately tell that the space of his War Rune's storage expanded.

As a Tier-0 Lord with a low refinement degree, the energy influx he received from killing a single Tier-1 prey was already quite high. Dealing the finishing blow to a dozen Tier-1 Gogis was equivalent to killing a few hundred Tierless Monsters.

One or two of the Gogis he killed had been 1-Star Warriors, which provided an even higher energy influx due to their elevated potential.

Despite that, Michael's refinement degree didn't reach the Mid-level. It was not that easy to increase the refinement degree of the War Rune, forget about advancing Tiers. Michael would have to work a lot harder to advance Tiers and become an even stronger Lord!

Michael climbed down the tree once he was done. He safely put everything back in his War Rune and walked over to the corpses of the Gogi. Tiara was already waiting for him over there.

"Master, are you fine?" She asked while breathing heavily. She was sweating profusely and could barely speak, but a bright smile had blossomed on her face, nonetheless.

After she witnessed her master's impeccable archery skills, Tiara couldn't help but look at him with a newfound reverence. She had never expected her master to be that powerful and versatile. He was already a good swordsman, and now he was an even better archer. Was there something her master was bad at, in the first place?

"I was not the bait, who ran around for several minutes while evading all kinds of projectiles. I was safe high up in the tree," Michael joked lightly before wholeheartedly commending Tiara, "You did an outstanding job. Thanks to you, we were able to decrease their numbers by a lot!"

Michael was still unsure how many subjects the Gogi Lord had, but the loss of 28 Gogis was certainly not easy to compensate. The Gogi Lord would have to think twice before ordering his subjects to attack Michael again.

Michael felt a little nauseous looking at the corpses of the Gogis he had killed but he could still hold the contents of his stomach inside. He didn't vomit. It was still not easy for him to kill, however, it had been much harder to kill Fenrir than attacking the Gogis.

Michael figured that he would get better with time. However, until then, he would have to suffer a lot. But that was fine because it was something everyone had to go through in order to grow.

Now that he thought about Fenrir, and how he had killed him, memories of Cleave Fenrir flashed through Michael's mind once again. The memories were mostly related to archery, and combat training rather than the first ancestor's evil deeds, and Michael had to secretly acknowledge their utility.

'It's good that I am getting more experienced through his memories. They were pretty useful in the fight...'

"There is no need to praise me so much, Master," Tiara said in all seriousness while her tail continued to wiggle excitedly.

It took him quite some effort not to burst out laughing as he looked at Tiara, but he somehow managed to keep a straight face. Michael collected his arrows and stored them inside his War Rune alongside three Gogis.

"Master, let me store the remaining corpses!" Tiara exclaimed, rushing to his aid promptly. She had a Tier-1 War Rune and could thus fit a lot more in her spatial storage than Michael.

Her storage space was only filled when the ten Gogi corpses lying around on the ground inside the protection barrier had been squeezed into it.

"Let's go back," Michael suggested once they were done.

He was a little bit disappointed because he had missed the chance of pursuing the remaining Gogis but he knew that it was for the better. He had no idea about the total number of Gogis around their territory, forget about their territory's structure. Blaire Tracer was also temporarily incapable of helping him for the next few days – if she survived that is.

Back in the clearing they retrieved the Gogis and laid them down in three lines. After that, Michael stared at the corpses for a while, wondering where to start from. There were a total of 28 corpses.

'They don't have a Monster Core, and I don't think there is much I can extract from them either.'

"The drops of the Origin Expanse, their hair...and maybe their blood?" Michael mumbled to himself, confused and unsure what else he should extract.

He figured that the Gogis' hair could be used as bedding, to make clothes, or to sell it to pharmaceutical companies. Some would certainly purchase it, though Michael was not certain how much money he could make.

One way or another, they required more resources. It was not as if they had excessive resources in his territory. They couldn't afford to throw away precious corpses and had to extract as much as possible to make the most out of them.

While Michael started extracting the Gogi corpses, Tiara was told to install the low-quality preservation enchantment array.

Michael gave it to her while also telling the Architect Apprentice to make use of the array and the warehouse blueprint to build a storage for all kinds of goods, including meat and other things that could go bad easily.

The War Rune's storage was great, but the space was severely restricted. Furthermore, only he and Tiara had spatial storages, and only they could access them. This had its own advantages and disadvantages. But all-in-all, it was much easier to use the preservation enchantment array together with the warehouse that would be built soon. That way, everyone could add and remove resources as they deemed necessary.

It was necessary to fuel the enchantment array with Monster Cores and though he did not have them right now, it was not that expensive to get them either. The resources he procured daily were bound to increase eventually, and it was necessary to prepare suitable storage with preservation enchantment beforehand.

It was already lunchtime when Michael finished extracting the last corpse. The warehouse's construction was not yet completed, but that was okay. They still had some time left.

Michael was very satisfied with the gains, which everyone could clearly see while he hogged one slab of meat after another just like the glutton he was.

'The food is good, and the gains I made are even better. What a great day to be alive!'

Chapter 36 Sun Soldier Breathing

Michael extracted a total of 290 Summoning Scroll Fragments, seven Ordinary Summoning Scrolls, and two Warrior Summoning Scrolls from the 28 Gogi corpses.

He merged the 275 Summoning Scroll Fragments into 11 Ordinary Summoning Scrolls and picked up the daily Summoning Scrolls the Summoning Gate created every day before he broke the seal of the Summoning Scrolls after finishing lunch.

A minute later, the number of Michael's subjects had increased by 17 starless summons, two 1-Star Warriors, a 1-Star Craftsman, and a 1-Star Scholar.

Michael's territory was now populated by close to 50 subjects. It was only the fourth day but he already had so many subjects – without the need to purchase a single summoning scroll!

That was fairly good, and something Michael could be proud of.

Unfortunately, it didn't solve all of his problems. Thanks to the additional workforce it would be quite easy to finish constructing the warehouse before dusk. A few subjects even proposed looking at the flora and fauna inside the protection barrier. A bunch of bushes and trees were located inside the protection barrier, and it would be a waste not to research them.

With a 1-Star Scholar leading the research, it might even be possible to find non-poisonous fruits or clues about the environment and vegetation all over the rainforest. It was worth a try!

As he devised plans, Michael watched the actions of his subjects intently. They didn't need any motivation to work, which was great. Unfortunately, that didn't help when it came to being able to fight against Tier-1 Monsters, forget about providing help in the fight against the Gogis.

Even the 1-Star Warriors would have to use the protection barrier to hunt and procure some energy first. They were still Tierless Warriors with the lowest degree of refinement. However, even if they were to hunt all day, it was near-impossible for them to advance to the 1st Tier before the protection barrier was lifted.

'In that case...I can only give them the techniques once I finish reading them. If I summon more Warriors, they'll be able to work together, and kill Tier-1 Monsters even without the protection barrier...right?' Michael thought while scratching the back of his head.

The easiest would be to decimate the population of monsters around his territory to decrease the burden and risk factor once the protection barrier was lifted. However, that was easier said than done. Blaire had explored the territory outside the protection barrier only once, but she had found the population of Tier-1 monsters to be high, oddly high!

Michael was deep in thought when he opened his mouth subconsciously to yawn. From one moment to the next the weight of his body seemed to have increased drastically. The excitement spreading through him had been exchanged with tiredness.

But who could hold that against him? Michael had been wide awake all night. He traveled back home under stress, fought the descendant of some big family during his shopping trip, and he returned to the Origin Expanse just to be faced with a group of Gogis, whom he fought while using his Soultraits for a prolonged period. He was mentally and physically exhausted.

Michael's body was begging for a break, but he didn't want to go sleep right now. It was too early, and his day would be wasted if he were to go sleep now and wake up late at night. Going out to hunt at night in the darkness where he was— unable to see anything was suicidal, and far from intelligent.

Michael took that into consideration and chose to do something less demanding; he started to read the Sun Soldier's Breathing technique after handing the Sun Soldier's Weaponry technique to his Warriors.

"Let's see what I paid 10,000\$ for. Don't disappoint me, please," Michael pleaded quietly as he opened the first page of the Sun Soldier Breathing technique inside his room. He sat comfortably on his bed and began to read the introductory part.

[Sun Soldiers of the Abyssal Sun Empire are known for their tireless combat. They can regulate their breathing even in the most desperate situations to calm their mind and body in a fraction of a second.]

[When the Abyssal Sun Empire was faced with a threat that nearly cost its annihilation, the Sun God's Elder Monk attained enlightenment. He was able to incorporate the Sun Breathing technique into the Army's training regime, creating the Sun Soldiers who are known for their efficient use of Stamina, tireless combat, and fast replenishment of energy.]

'Are they trying to show off? Just give me the juicy details I want to know!' Michael grumbled inwardly after he finished reading the introductory part.

[The Sun Soldier Breathing technique can be divided into two versions.

The first version is deep belly breathing, which involves conscious engaging in the diaphragm, a dome-shaped muscle located below the lungs, to achieve slower, deeper breaths. Practicing the first version increases oxygen and energy intake and enhances the awareness of the present moment. It calms the mind, reduces stress, and helps inculcate a deeper sense of presence and mindfulness. It is a technique that requires lots of practice and focus. It cannot be practiced on the battlefield and is more of a technique that prepares the Soldier for the battle.

The second version of the Sun Soldier Breathing technique changes the practitioner's breathing fundamentally. To practice this version properly, the practitioner needs a deep understanding of the body and the Sun Soldier Breathing's first version. The body and mind will have to learn to breathe in a specific way, which will decrease the consumption of Stamina drastically. The intake of oxygen and energy with every breath will increase, and it forces the practitioner to keep calm in dangerous situations. An in-depth understanding of the body and mind will be imprinted in the mind of the practitioner, allowing the practitioner to freely utilize the energy and oxygen inside the body.

...]

Michael was not sure how long he had read the Sun Soldier Breathing technique, but he was intrigued. The second version attracted his interest because it allowed the practitioner to use the Sun Soldier Breathing technique passively.

A high understanding of the body and mind was required to start practicing the second version of the Sun Soldier Breathing technique, and it would reward the practitioner with an even deeper understanding of himself. That was especially interesting.

'Is that why this technique is said to possess great potential? It increases the understanding of mind and body even though the practitioner's understanding has to be high, to begin with...very interesting!' Michael thought, closing the book.

Initially, he wanted to go to sleep after reading a little bit, but Michael changed his plan. He knew that he was too excited to go to sleep and started practicing the first version of the Sun Soldier's Breathing right away.

It wasn't too difficult to get started since a better understanding of his body and mind came with time and practice.

'Even if I'm tired, I can give it a try. There is no harm even if I fail to practice the first version miserably!'

A moment later, Michael found a comfortable position on the bed where he sat cross-legged with an upright yet relaxed posture. Then he closed his eyes, allowing his body and mind to relax by letting go of all distractions – including the distraction caused by being able to think.

After a few seconds, Michael placed his hands on the abdomen. He rested his hands gently on his lower abdomen and inhaled deeply through the nose. In a slow and controlled manner, he drew the air deep into his lungs, expanding his abdomen as he breathed in.

Michael focused on the lower area of the lungs to allow the diaphragm to descend and create space for oxygen and energy. Then, he exhaled through the mouth, slowly and steadily, while trying to feel how the abdomen reacted as the diaphragm rose.

Most energy was lost when he breathed out, but a trace remained in his abdomen where his body absorbed it naturally.

It was only a minuscule trace of energy, however, that was already much better than Michael expected.

He thought that it would require a few dozen attempts before he would be able to absorb his first trace of energy. Fortunately, he was a little bit faster.

Intrigued by how far he could advance, Michael repeated the deep belly breathing once again. He maintained a natural and gentle rhythm while continuing to practice for the next two hours.

After two hours, the stress he had accumulated during the last few days seemed to disperse and the tension in his body was released.

He fell asleep soon afterward, while darkness consumed the territory and terrifying roars reverberated across the dense rainforest.

Chapter 37 Generating Resources

When Michael woke up, he felt extremely calm and at ease.

His mind was void of worries and his body felt much lighter than before. How was that even possible? Was it owed to a few hours of practicing the Sun Soldier Breathing technique?

"That's amazing!" He blurted out as he got up from the bed. The sun had already risen beyond the horizon, but Michael was not worried about the amount of work he had to complete today.

Somehow, he was certain that everything would be alright as long as he gave his utmost effort to make it work.

Michael made his way out of the wooden manor with that belief. Most subjects were already awake and working on new treehouse complexes, while others were busy collecting the fruits, they found inside the protection barrier.

Apparently, the rainforest had cocoa pods of high quality and fruits that looked like mangoes, and tasted like mangoes, but weren't mangoes.

Michael gladly feasted on some freshly harvested Tiatcha, which was the local name for the mango-like fruit.

After mostly eating meat for the last few days, Michael felt like his taste buds came back alive. It was like he was thrown into a blissful moment of tropical indulgence when he took the first bite of the Tiatcha. The Tiatcha combined sweet juiciness and tangy flavors with the tropical essence of the rainforest, which created an intoxicating aroma and a bittersweet taste.

"If we can produce more Tiatcha, we can have enough for ourselves and sell the rest for a good price," Michael thought aloud. He knew that it would take a while to grow more Tiatcha trees, but the Tiatcha trees seemed like a reliable source of income, just like the Bilrox eggs.

They hadn't hatched yet, but it was only a matter of time before they would hatch, mature, and produce more eggs. By the time a small Bilrox horde formed, he would have two decent sources of income, mounts to ride and sweet fruits to eat.

The thought alone was enough to make him smile contently.

"You're already awake, Master!" Tiara and the two 1-Star Warriors ran over to Michael when they saw him pace through the clearing. He was strolling around and observing his people as they went about their day to get a rough understanding of his territory's progress.

Michael saw a big quiver full of spears slung around the Warriors' back, and fresh blood trickled down Tiara's silver spear.

"You went out to hunt already?" He asked Tiara, who nodded her head.

"I wanted to show our newcomers how dangerous our territory is and why it is so important for everyone to become stronger," She answered, "I also demonstrated how to hunt the monsters of the rainforest with the protection barrier's help. Luckily, we have enough throwing spears to attack from further away now!"

The Gogis had thrown more than 100 throwing spears at the protection barrier before they gave up on their attempt to break it and retreated. Tiara and the two Warriors collected the spears the day before and spent a few hours training with them. This morning, they made use of their practice from the day before to hunt a few monsters.

Tiara retrieved four corpses with a bright smile, "They were able to hunt one monster each while I killed the other two!

Her voice was filled with pride, and Michael could understand why she felt like that. If more people inside the territory were able to hunt monsters, their gains would increase. In return, Michael would have more corpses to extract. The number of Summoning Scroll Fragments and Summoning Scrolls in his possession would increase as well, and so would the chance to summon more subjects with combat-oriented occupations!

Furthermore, Michael would also receive an energy influx more often since his subjects would kill more monsters, but that was trivial when compared to the increased chance of summoning more Warriors and other combat units!

Tiara and the Warriors shared their experience when hunting the monsters while he used Extraction on the four bodies. After using his Soultrait more than a hundred times in the last four days his proficiency and understanding of the Soultrait had improved drastically.

Completing the extraction of a monster he had already extracted from several times took less than five minutes, and he didn't waste/damage any energy, or body parts either. Michael walked over to the warehouse once the extraction was completed, and he activated the preservation enchantment array using one of the Monster Cores.

The enchantment array cooled the entire area of the warehouse, and it could be configured to have intense cooling in certain areas compared to the rest. That was something Michael wanted to test out in the future.

However, for now, he had to listen to the daily morning report. Michael had introduced this practice to make sure that he would be informed about the newest changes after waking up every day.

With the use of this report, Michael would be well informed about his territory. That way, he would get to know about obstacles that his subjects faced completing a task and provide solutions on a real-time basis while also assigning tasks for the day. Additionally, he would have daily interaction with everybody which would increase his subjects' cooperation and sense of unity.

"So, to summarize everything, the warehouse has been completed, the Gogis' body hair has been used as bedding, various tools have been created with the remaining resources, and we're currently lacking more resources, which include water and sturdy construction material," Michael said after he read the report. Tiara nodded but she quietly added,

"Blair will survive but she has to rest for a few more days to recuperate properly, and we need more treehouses if the population of the territory is going to expand soon."

Michael licked his dry lips while contemplating his next set of orders. He stretched his neck and nodded his head.

"Tell the craftsman to create a few large barrels," Michael ordered, "I need a few people to follow me. The stronger they are the better."

After he said that, Michael left the clearing. He scanned the trees around him and nodded his head once he found two large rainforest trees that had grown next to each other. They were restricting each other's growth. That meant he could remove one of them without any qualms.

Initially, Michael wanted to use the next few days to solve the problem they had with the Gogis, but it was obvious that rushing anything wouldn't be helpful. On the contrary, focusing on the Gogis would harm his territory since they lacked various resources to be self-sufficient.

Michael could provide the resources using Extraction, and that was exactly what he did.

"I wonder how much energy I need to process you," He mumbled as a golden light conjured in his right hand.

A few seconds later, he began extracting blocks of sturdy wood from the tree in front of him.

Michael didn't stop until his energy ran out. His breathing was ragged, and his back was drenched in sweat, but a satisfied smile appeared on his face.

He was not even close to finishing processing the large rainforest tree, but the amount of resources he procured was already more than he had expected to extract from the entire tree.

That fueled his motivation, and he spent the remaining morning and noon diligently working on extracting everything useful from the tree before he couldn't handle it anymore.

He was constantly running out of energy, sweating profusely and his mind was slowly going awry. Adding the toll of constantly using Extraction to that, Michael clearly exceeded his limit.

Fortunately, his Soultrait had grown stronger after the Link of Loyalty of several dozen summons was added to his War Rune, and Tiara went out hunting with the two Warriors.

Bursts of energy reached him through their Link of Loyalty whenever they killed a monster, providing the support he needed to keep going until the large tree had been fully processed.

Michael could extract the moisture in the blocks of wood after extracting them once. That removed the need for air-drying, which made it easier to use the sturdy wood for construction projects such as the treehouse complexes and the warehouse.

Once he finished his work for the day, Michael rested a bit.

He practiced the Sun Soldier Breathing a little to empty his mind, which was harder than the day before. Michael realized the core problem in the fight against the Gogi Lord and his subjects had been the fact that all Gogis were natural fighters, while the same didn't apply to humans.

'Only Tiara is strong enough to aid me in the fight against the Gogis...but one of us needs to stay behind to manage everything and protect everyone...Tiara could help the warriors get stronger, but that doesn't change the core problem.'

He had only a handful of Warriors, and the few he had couldn't help him yet.

The Sun Soldier techniques' impact was not big yet, no matter how much future potential they had.

On the brighter side, Michael and Tiara's combat prowess were quite impactful.

"It doesn't matter how all of it began, we're on hostile terms with the Gogi Lord. Either we obliterate him, or he obliterated us once the protection barrier has been lifted," Michael mumbled quietly to himself.

He summarized the events and the bits of information at his disposal.

"That means, I have to defeat them before the protection barrier is lifted... I will be able to take them by surprise if I attack earlier..."

"But do I have what it takes?" He asked himself the most crucial question.

A few hours later when it was already dark outside, Tiara knocked on his door. Michael was a little surprised to see her that late in front of his room but when he saw what she pushed into his arms he could only nod his head.

"You're right, I might need them."

Chapter 38 Outside The Territory

Michael's sixth day as a Lord began early in the morning.

He picked up the Ordinary Summoning Scroll from today and the day before and listened to the daily report while extracting the monsters Tiara and the two Warriors hunted yesterday.

Two and a half hours later, Michael was finally done, and the dissected body parts were neatly stored in the warehouse.

'16 Scrolls...not bad,' He mumbled after merging the Summoning Scroll Fragments together. Michael broke the scrolls' seals and welcomed his new subjects.

Out of the 16 summons, fourteen were starless, and two were 1-Star Summons. Surprisingly, one of the 1-Star Summons was a Warrior, while the other was a Craftsman.

At last, his military force started to expand!

"Head to the southern wall of the protection barrier and assist the Battle Maid and Warriors," He ordered the Warrior, who saluted instinctively.

Michael had yet to realize that his presence and demeanor were changing slowly. He was getting more confident while his presence grew stronger and more charismatic. His command was also precise and decisive, which made it clear that Michael understood what had to be done.

This was more than enough to instill confidence in the Warrior. The Warrior departed after a second salute to heed the commands he had been given.

Meanwhile, Michael turned his attention to the other summons. He told the craftsman to join the other craftsman to create furniture, kitchenware, and other woodwork while telling the others to join the construction of more treehouse complexes.

After that, he retrieved the Boots of Taran and bound them to his War Rune. Last night Tiara had visited him to return the Boots of Taran. She was not sure what Michael planned to do, but she could tell that he wanted to do something dangerous.

Michael had been working on a plan all day, and he concluded that his window of opportunity wasn't that big anymore. Gogis might not be the smartest, but it didn't need much of a brain to figure out that Michael was at a horrifying disadvantage.

He was a new Lord, and only one of his subjects was Tier-1. That was already bad, but he had only four days left before the protection barrier would be lifted and the Gogi Lord could bulldoze his territory.

Michael had to act within those four days to change the fate of his territory.

Nonetheless, the Gogi Lord was highly likely to be waiting. Gogis may be a simple-minded race that had more muscles than brains, but they were also a social race that focused on camaraderie.

Michael witnessed firsthand that they would sacrifice their own lives in an attempt to protect their comrades.

That was why the Gogi Lord wouldn't attack Michael's territory if the protection barrier was still up. He had already burnt his fingers by attacking Michael's territory and was forced to retreat humiliatingly after his subjects had already been beaten senseless. The Gogi Lord ensured to keep his subjects unharmed instead of camping near the protection barrier, where they were certain to be hunted down mercilessly.

Michael didn't have to worry about finding someone camping outside the protection barrier, waiting to ambush him but he was vigilant when he decided to leave his territory. As a precautionary measure, he had a long talk with his injured Tracker before stepping out of his territory.

It was not the first time that he left the protection barrier, but he would always stick close to it and had yet to leave the proximity. That was what he had to do today to collect more information and see whether his plan was feasible.

'Calm down, you'll be fine,' Michael repeated the line like a mantra.

He left his territory and made his way to the lizard cave Blaire had mentioned earlier. Michael recalled some interesting facts about reptiles and amphibians, and he wanted to see if the same facts applied to reptilian monsters of the Origin Expanse.

On his way to the lizard cave, Michael encountered a few monsters. He avoided them by climbing the nearest trees or by hiding in the bushes.

Even if he was not the best at stealthily walking through the dense rainforest, Michael was good enough to avoid fighting Low Tier-1 Monsters head-on. One monster followed him when it picked up the scent, but it departed the moment Michael retrieved the Antler Bow and a few arrows from his War Rune.

That was the worst incident Michael faced on his way to the lizard cave.

'Is luck finally on my side?' He thought ironically as he found himself standing in front of the lizard cave's entrance. He hadn't been pulled into a life-and-death fight yet, but he had a bad feeling about the lizard cave. If it were possible to avoid entering the lizard cave until he got a little stronger, Michael would have done it.

Unfortunately, he didn't have that much time. The Gogis were already waiting for him, after all!

The entrance of the lizard cave looked like an arched Gate that had formed naturally over the course of time. It was seven meters high and of similar width.

Michael stepped through the entrance while ignoring the eerie feeling Blaire told him about. He scanned the entire cavern entrance with his Eagle Eyes unleashed and took in every detail he was able to make out.

'No monster? In that case...'

He bent down while golden streams conjured in his palms.

'Show me what you got, little lizard cave!'

Using Extraction in the cavern entrance allowed him to extract various minerals from the ground. However, Michael focused on the valuables and materials that could be useful against the Gogi Lord.

"Gloa Crystals...now it makes sense why the deeper parts of the lizard cave are so bright. There is also Zantine Ore? If the ore deposit is large, I've found a treasure..." Michael mumbled to himself as small purple shards and bits of a silverish-green ore manifested in the golden streams of his Soultrait.

Zantine Ore was considered the equal of iron ore in the Origin Expanse. It was a little bit more durable and flexible, but it was quite common in the Origin Expanse, so it was not exactly a jackpot. Fortunately, there was always a demand for Zantine Ore.

A white crystal manifested not long after. It was small and crumbled when Michael used some force to test its durability.

'Is that chalk? It could also be magnesite or something like that...well, whatever.'

Michael extracted a few more samples of everything to get it inspected by the Scholar once he returned. The Scholar should be able to tell him more about the materials of the Origin Expanse.

Other than Gloa Crystal, Zantine Ore, and the fragile, white crystals, Michael was able to extract three different types of ores. Their quantity was much smaller compared to the others, but that made sense if one could find their deposits deeper underground. Michael was monitoring the consumption of his Soultrait and using it judiciously.

Once he collected enough samples, Michael went deeper inside the lizard cave, using the only tunnel connected to the cavern entrance.

The eeriness of the lizard cave caused goosebumps to spread across his tensed body. However, he continued to walk deeper into the cave until he found a small tunnel on his left.

Michael stopped to look, and his expression lit up.

'Eggs! Six of them at that!' He exclaimed seeing the oval-shaped eggs. Immediately, he scanned the tunnel but there was no mature lizard.

"Where is your mom, my little eggs?"

It was at that moment, a low growl echoed through the cavern tunnel.

Michael flinched and slowly turned to his right, careful not to make any sudden movements.

And a moment later, he found the lizard mother...or would it be better to say that the mother found him?

Chapter 39 The Lizard

For Michael to execute his plan properly, the lizards in the cave couldn't be too weak. Being Low Tier-1 Monsters wouldn't have been enough.

Fortunately, luck was on his side...or would it be better to call it 'misfortune', right now?

A huge lizard the size of a shuttle was growling at him menacingly. It was standing at less than five meters separating them. It had green scales and large reptilian eyes that stared at him in hatred – or so Michael thought.

His hair stood up on its end and he felt like someone was squeezing his throat tightly. The pressure weighing down on him made it hard to breathe.

'Is that the pressure of a Peak Tier-1 Monster, or is it already at the 2nd Tier?' Michael wondered while his body remained frozen.

He didn't move a single inch, hoping that the Lizard would redirect its attention elsewhere. Still, the reptilian eyes kept staring at him, crushing his little hope slowly.

The Lizard didn't seem happy about the intruder, but the overflowing pressure decreased slightly when it glanced over to its eggs and saw that they were unharmed.

'Now!'

Michael used the opportunity to kick his feet off the ground. He manifested the Boots of Taran and empowered the artifact's Swiftess enchantment.

His acceleration skyrocketed, and he reached full speed within seconds. He headed to the cavern entrance without looking back even once. That was not needed. Michael could hear the lizard mother's roar and feel the tremors in the ground as the monster began its pursuit.

Despite sprinting as fast as he could and crossing close to 20 meters a second, Michael could tell that he was not fast enough. The lizard mother closed the distance between them rapidly.

'Fuck...I shouldn't have underestimated my opponents...'

Michael knew that the rainforest was dangerous from the beginning. However, he had been foolish enough to enter the lizard cave without ample preparations despite knowing that. Blaire had even told him that the cave was eerie and more dangerous than the dense rainforest, yet he had somehow believed he could return unharmed.

'That's a really dumb way to die—...no...just think less and run more!'

Michael cursed himself, but he couldn't switch off his mind. Too many thoughts flashed through his mind to survive while the shuttle-sized lizard was getting closer.

The tremors spreading through the ground began to affect Michael's mind. His breathing got ragged, and he felt anxiety rising from the deepest pits of his body. Michael broke into a sweat, and he vividly imagined the lizard swallowing him whole.

It was at that moment when a memory flashed through his mind- the reason he entered the lizard cave, in the first place.

'Some reptiles are invested in caring for their young!'

The lizard mother's overflowing pressure receded when her eggs began to shake. She had looked over to her eggs worriedly which Michael had used as an opportunity to run for his life.

The moment Michael recalled this; his body began to move of its own accord.

He twisted his body and turned back while unleashing the Eagle Eyes Soultrait to the full extent. Simultaneously, the Antler Bow and an arrow emerged from within the War Rune.

Michael's hands moved instinctively. His left hand reached out for the Antler Bow's frame while his right hand was already holding the arrow nocked on the bowstring.

He inserted energy in the Antler Bow, pulled back the bowstring, and let go the moment the bow was drawn out fully.

The arrow soared through the air at full speed in the following instance.

Michael turned back while the Antler Bow turned into a white wisp that shot back into the War Rune. He stumbled for a moment but quickly regained balance. Michael reached top speed once again and kept running without caring to see what was going on behind him.

When he released the arrow, his Eagle Eyes were fully focused on the lizard mother's eggs. Michael had never intended to shoot at the lizard mother. Killing her was out of options with a Tierless 1-Star Artifact

as well. He knew that he would just enrage her and that his chances of survival would decrease even further.

Being fairly intelligent, the lizard realized what was about to happen when an arrow shot past her. The beast reacted instinctively, swiping its tail at the arrow with tremendous force. Yet, despite its quick and instinctive reaction, the tail missed the arrow by a hair's breadth.

In the next second, the arrow disappeared inside the cavity.

A multitude of sounds rang out from the cavern, and the lizard mother came to a halt at last. she stared back at the small cavern tunnel, only to turn back to Michael the next second.

She opened her mouth widely, revealing a dark-greenish substance that had accumulated inside. The lizard mother took aim and released the dark-greenish substance in Michael's direction. Afterward, she turned around to rush back into the tunnel. If even one of her eggs had been damaged, she would hunt down Michael and torture him until he died miserably.

Michael was already close to the cavern entrance that shone brightly in the midday sun when his hair suddenly stood on its end.

'Hmm?'

He knew that the lizard mother wasn't behind him anymore. The tremors in the ground were fewer than before, but something seemed fishy

His highly enhanced perception was telling him that something was wrong and that he was standing at death's door. The Grim Reaper's scythe was pressed against his neck, cold and merciless.

However, the only thing Michael could think about at this moment was the weird sound the lizard mother had released before turning away.

'...Almost like the sound of a human spitti—...WA-...'

Michael used his full force to dive left all of a sudden. His ankles felt like they were about to burst from the sudden change of trajectory, but Michael endured the pain as he smashed hard into the ground.

In the next instance, something splashed on the exact spot he had been standing just a moment before.

Michael took a second to realize what had happened. He got up from the ground and looked at the dark-greenish substance corroding through the hard stone ground.

"Oh my..." Michael blurted out.

'Acidic spit, for real?!'

The thought of nearly being hit by this much acid caused chills to run down his spine.

Michael instinctively looked back into the cavern tunnel, but the lizard mother was not there anymore, fortunately.

"Good thing that I didn't aim at the eggs," He mumbled before he got up to leave the lizard cave.

Michael didn't think twice and rushed to his territory without delay. His mission inside the cave had been completed successfully even if it may not look like it.

It had been a hassle and a near brush with the Grim Reaper's scythe, but he escaped death by a hair's breadth and was able to find out everything he needed to know while staying alive and relatively unharmed.

Back in his territory, Michael handed the Scholar the materials he procured in the lizard cave.

Afterward, he used the information he procured to finalize his plan and make ample preparations for his next move.

The next day, when the first ray of sunlight reached the rainforest, Michael left his territory once again.

However, this time it was not to gather information.

This time Michael left for war.

[End of Volume 1: Lord of the Untamed Jungle]

Chapter 40 War & Deceit

A silver streak passed through the darkness like a shooting star crossing the cloudless sky.

Thud

The silver streak impacted, impaling the target that slumped to the ground writhing and thrashing for dear life.

The violent movements lasted a few seconds, but nobody came to the target's aid. Instead, a shadow emerged next to the dying man.

"This is really disgusting," The shadow mumbled.

A thin longsword materialized in his right hand, and he sliced it through the dying man's neck with a single move, ending his suffering.

Blood spurted through the surrounding area while the dying man finally went still.

The longsword turned into a white wisp that disappeared in the shadow's War Rune a moment later. Meanwhile, the shadow stepped forward to retrieve the arrow that was stuck deep in the Gogi's gaping mouth.

One moment, the Gogi was yawning – tired from a long night watch – and the next moment an arrow drilled into his mouth.

The Gogi didn't even realize what happened before it was already too late. The shadow killed him without a second thought.

"I still feel guilty whenever I kill someone," The shadow mumbled to himself, "I wonder if it's possible to kill without remorse..."

As the shadow looked at the dead Gogi, the first rays of the early sunrise shone through the canopy of humongous trees. The sunrays showered the shadow with soft light, revealing Michael beneath a black cloak.

Michael received a cloak made from the Gogis' black hair as a present the day before. One of his subjects made it for him, and Michael made use of it immediately.

His left hand reached out to the inside pocket of the black cloak when he heard a twig breaking. His ears perked up and he dashed to the side, hiding in the shadow of the nearest tree.

"Gurastan! Walkata, Meria!"

A second Gogi emerged through the thicket after his hoarse voice tore through the silence. The Gogi was less than ten meters away from Michael and the dead Gogi's body.

Tigerfang and the Boots of Taran materialized the moment the Gogi saw his comrade. The Gogi jumped to his comrade in the hopes of rescuing him, however, it was already too late. The body was deathly still.

"Join your friend," Michael muttered as he emerged next to the Gogi. Tigerfang sliced through the Gogi's neck like a hot knife through butter living up to the sharpness of an Epic Artifact.

Michael used more force to twist Tigerfang, dealing the finishing blow to the helpless Gogi.

The Gogi's lethal mistake was that it didn't expect anyone to be daring enough to attack their territory. Night duty was just a formality to make sure that no untoward incidents occurred. Until today, no monster had been foolish enough to attack the Gogi Lord in the dense forest.

Today, however, was different.

Today was the day everything would change.

Michael initiated an all-out war, and he wouldn't stop until his last breath – or until he won.

Of course, he had a plan.

Blood splattered on his face as he pulled Tigerfang out of the dead Gogi. The thin longsword returned to his War Rune where he could summon it at will, instantaneously.

He twitched when the warm blood spurted on his face before it trickled down slowly. He made a disgusted face as he looked around in his surrounding area.

Michael received the energy influx from the second Gogi after the life in its eye dispersed. He reached into the inner pocket of the cloak and dropped something on each corpse before he departed.

His movements were deadly silent as he entered the Gogi Lord's territory.

"Let's see how fierce you can be...and how much you love your offspring..." Michael mumbled to himself as he dropped another object from his cloak's inner pocket.

Michael felt a little bit bad about what he was going to do, but he was also painfully aware that being merciful and not utilizing every possible means at his disposal would result in a disastrous end for him and his territory.

He was not a good person; he had never been one. Michael always desired to use the Origin Expanse to become stronger, and he knew what that entailed, the choices and sacrifices he would have to make. It required tremendous strength and courage to stay alive in places that were controlled by the strong and wealthy.

The strength Michael had to accumulate was not only physical but also mental. He had to bear the responsibility for his actions no matter how burdensome it might be.

whenever he killed someone for his sake – if only to survive – Michael felt a slight pang of guilt, but he only had two choices- either choose to live with the burden or to perish with it. And he knew that over time, this feeling of guilt would lessen though it was debatable if he wanted to become a senseless killing machine or not. But that thought could wait for now.

He clenched his fists tightly while going further ahead. Michael knew what he was going to do, and what he had to do to survive. Never in his life had he been more aware of his action's repercussions than today.

Now that he was inside the Gogi Lord's territory all by himself, Michael had to be vigilant. He didn't think that the Gogis had installed traps around their territory because they were more likely to trigger them rather than catching invaders, being a somewhat dumb species but it would be troublesome if he was to encounter a group of them.

No sooner had he thought this, a group of two Gogis appeared on the trodden trail to his right, as he was jinxed.

His eyes began to glow, and his stance changed at once as he burst into their direction. The Gogis were simply strolling around in their territory and had their guard lowered. Who would expect a fully armed opponent to appear next to them? Nor had t expected a silver streak to pass by, forget about the possibility of their head rolling over the ground the first thing in the morning.

Their energy influx reached Michael a moment later, but it didn't boost his strength significantly like usual. This was because he had attained the Mid-level refinement degree last night.

'Mid-level degree of refinement and an enhancement from three Artifacts, combined with a Soultrait seems to be enough to handle unguarded Gogis...what a wonder...' He thought ironically as he retrieved another object from his cloak's inner pocket.

He put it on one of the corpses and looked around afterward. Few Gogis were awake yet, but Michael could hear some commotion a little further ahead. The densely grown flora and fauna blocked his sight, however, that could be considered an advantage.

'She is not here yet, so I might as well—...'

Just when that thought flashed through his mind a terrifying roar reverberated through the surroundings.

The corners of Michael's lip curled upward, and goosebumps spread all over his body upon hearing the familiar sound.

'What did I even expect?' He thought, questioning whether it was just fate that he jinxed himself repetitively, or if it was related to the first ancestors and his sins.

Maybe, it was both.

Either way, Michael retrieved the remaining fist-sized oval-shaped objects hurriedly before he threw them closer to the center of the Gogi Lord's territory.

The 'objects', also known as a lizard's eggs, shattered without resistance.

Mayhem followed soon after as the Lizard mother paved her way through the dense rainforest, pursuing the filthy thief who had stolen her eggs.

This filthy thief was none other than Michael, who resorted to calling his backup to thrust the Gogi Lord in a battle he will never forget.

Unfortunately, his backup required some 'motivation', which Michael gladly delivered.