

Supreme Lord 391

Chapter 391 Rage & Fury

Tiara was having the time of her life. She was bleeding from several shallow wounds but kept moving despite the pain. Her movement speed increased as the battle progressed. It was almost like Tiara was growing more adept at using the power of her transformed Silvarean Tiger form.

The sudden changes in her movement added through Inner Force were also helping her have great agility. Tiara feinted attacks left and right, all while slicing through the throats of a handful of enemies. Most of them couldn't even pinpoint the true direction in which her attacks would hit and reacted when it was already way too late.

Tiara's kill count increased rapidly, but so did the injuries that accumulated on her body. Her energy consumption was not too low either. Continuously supplying her Soultrait Spirit Whip with energy while allowing Silvarean Tiger and Inner Force to consume her stamina to be maintained and used continuously was depleting her of stamina. Tiara was slowly growing tired.

The pressure on her body and mind increased, while the same happened to the strength of the enemies all around her. Tiara didn't realize it yet because her entire being was caught in bloodlust, but Lowest Tier-3 Guards were already near her, putting more pressure on Tiara to slowly wear her down. As long as Tiara was out of stamina and energy, she could be crippled, caught, and tortured.

Torturing ordinary beings was already highly pleasurable for most Kitsun. However, seeing the desperation and suffering in the eyes of beautiful existences was even better. Tiara belonged to the Silverfang Tigerfolk, and she was an otherworldly beauty. The Kitsun wouldn't want to waste such a great opportunity to obtain a new toy to torture.

'She should leave,' Michael thought, his eyes narrowed as Eagle Eyes and Spirit Gaze unraveled every little detail in his sight. Tiara was faring well, but the number of enemies, and their strength, was slowly growing into a burden.

If Tiara had the means to replenish her stamina and energy it wouldn't be much of a problem to let her continue fighting. However, since she didn't have the means, Tiara had to leave the battlefield now.

The Golden Stinger Wasp swapped places with Tiara as her Spirit Spear cut through the neck of a Peak Tier-2 Adventurer. She twisted her body and was just about to strike the next opponent when the space

around her twisted. Tiara disappeared and reappeared next to the Elemental Empress, who looked at Tiara with wonder in her eyes.

"Michael told me to tell you that you did an amazing job. You stalled enough time for our Master's plan to be set in motion on the battlefield. It's fine to rest and retreat home with the others. Don't worry about Master. He'll be fine!" The Elemental Empress informed just before a golden light flashed across the battlefield.

Stinger moved back to the Elemental Empress, where a small fist-sized portal manifested. The portal led to the EmeraldLeaf Adventurer team and the Greater Eagles. Stinger moved through the portal and forcefully deported Tiara by swapping places once again.

Afterward, Stinger remained next to the Elemental Empress.

"You don't want to leave yet? Master said that you can rest if you want. You must be out of stamina and energy from using your ability so often," The Elemental Empress asked the Golden Stinger Wasp, which shook its head vigorously.

The Elemental Empress didn't say anything else. She observed the battlefield in front of her, her expressions grim.

Despite giving their utmost, Tiara, Lilica, Pheli, and Liopham hadn't been able to do as much damage as the combined efforts of Mika and Opars. The power of the heirloom arrows had been too strong in comparison. Unfortunately, Mika couldn't use the same kind of power several times in succession. Not only would that use up his last remaining heirloom arrows, but it would also permanently damage his energy veins.

Using one heirloom arrow was already enough to leave him weak and injured for a few days.

Nonetheless, Michael's subordinates did an amazing job.

Roughly 7,500 Kitsun had been killed, and there was still a batch of 4,000 Kitsun injured. Most of them were lying on the ground, unable to get up after the explosions of the duplicated heirloom arrows hit them. Meanwhile, the other injured Kitsun either retreated or remained where they were.

They didn't bother getting up to attack Michael. After all, there were only so many people who could attack a single enemy at the same time.

Given the tight space around Michael it was impossible for more than ten Kitsun to strike him simultaneously. But then again, there were more than enough Kitsun Awakened who couldn't care less about the Summons around them. They used their Soultraits to strike Michael as heavily as possible – even if that meant that their own brethren would sustain injuries.

In fact, it would be even better if their brethren were injured in the crossfire. And that was something Michael exploited to the fullest. He moved deeper into the crowd of enemies with hundreds of tiny golden threads squirming all around him. The golden threads were jutting out from his skin all over his body. They wiggled vigorously and shot toward those who had sustained injuries.

The golden threads infiltrated the injured Kitsun's body through their wounds and anchored themselves inside them. They tapped into their pool of energy and drained it slowly. Most injured Kitsun targeted by the golden threads were either Tier-1 Guards or Summons at the lower end of the 2nd Tier. This was to ensure that Michael wouldn't have to focus on the extraction of energy within the bodies of his enemies. The threads of extraction could naturally extract their energy, as long as their mental resistance wasn't strong enough to block them.

Therefore, Michael chose the weaker Kitsun as easy targets to become his extended energy storage. The extracted energy naturally entered Michael's body. It was annexed inside his body and used to create more golden threads. These golden threads were then used to anchor inside more enemies, therefore draining even more energy that was annexed by Michael.

Michael repeated the same course of actions in a seemingly endless cycle while his subordinates had fought desperately to stall for some time. That way, Michael could go all out with a tremendous amount of replenishable energy now that he was alone on the battlefield.

No. He wasn't even alone right now.

The Elemental Empress was still nearby. She advanced to the 1st Tier, increasing the strength of her Powers drastically. The only downside of her Powers was that she lacked fighting experience with them and that she couldn't control her energy precisely to fight many enemies simultaneously.

But, of course, Michael's plan not only took that factor into consideration but also used it to their advantage!

If she couldn't control her energy consumption precisely, why wouldn't he help out a little bit with his extremely high replenishable energy? Even if he created a thousand Glacicles right now, Michael would have enough energy to keep his energy storage filled to the brim. However, ordinary Glacicles were not powerful enough to deal with more than ten thousand Kitsun – forget about their strongest powerhouses.

Thus, Michael could only rely on the Elemental Empress and their taming bond. He channeled energy through their taming bond that had grown a lot firmer over the last few hours.

Witnessing Michael's care and the attention he paid to his subjects allowed the Elemental Empress to trust her new master a lot more than before. The Elemental Empress realized that she would not only be a mere toy for Michael but that she might even turn into a part of his family.

By sending energy through the taming bond, Michael filled the Elemental Empress with enough purified energy to create dozens of compressed fire spears. The Elemental Empress released them in batches, finally not forced to focus on her energy consumption.

Being allowed to go all out without the need to think of anything, the Elemental Empress could finally unleash her fury. The fury as the Empress of the Elementals, and the wrath of all the Elementals that died protecting her coursed through her body. After getting abused, exploited, and chained to a wall for a decade, and forced to use her Core to create more Elementals with the essence of the elements she could control, the Elemental Empress finally got a chance to take revenge for herself and all those who shared her suffering. At last, she could ensure that the deaths of her subjects had not been an utter waste.

Feeling determined, she tapped into the Power of the fire element, and her fire spears grew stronger and stronger. She manifested more fire spears at the same time with every batch released, and shot them toward the battlefield not caring whether lowly Tier-1 Summons died, or if her attacks hit Kitsun Awakened.

All she wanted was to be the cause of the Kitsun's death no matter what kind of Kitsun. None of them was void of guilt. They were all at fault for the suffering of other races, and none of them deserved to stay alive – not even as Summons.

A dozen fire spears turned into two dozen, and then three dozen. Once the number of fire spears reached 50 in a batch, the Elemental Empress' mind couldn't handle anymore. However, being mentally limited to roughly 50 fire spears didn't mean that the Elemental Empress was willing to accept this limitation.

She might only be an existence at the 1st Tier right now, and at the lowest rank at that, but her rage and fury couldn't be measured on a power scale. So what if she would suffer a little bit by pushing past her mental limitations? Would she die from it if she overdid it? Maybe...but so what?

If she could take revenge on all Kitsun and eliminate them one by one, why wouldn't she give her all to achieve it...even if it would cost her life.

Thus she continued to attack mercilessly. And, as her barrages of fire spears struck the Kitsun, killing dozens in every charge, the Kitsun focusing on Michael were slowly drawn to the Elemental Empress.

They had been ordered to kill everyone else before paying attention to the Elemental Empress and capture her alive. However, the Elemental Empress was too powerful to be ignored. If they ignored her any longer, thousands would die long before Michael was killed.

Therefore, the first few Kitsun charged over to the Elemental Empress.

But before anyone could reach her, a golden light filled the air. Stinger disappeared from the Elemental Empress' sight and Michael appeared in its stead.

"Not so fast, you disgusting bastards," Michael growled deeply, the Elemental Empress' conscious slowly seeping into the taming bond, rage filling his entire being.

"We're just getting started."

Chapter 392 Fusion

Michael struggled a little bit against the strongest Kitsun before he swapped places with Stinger. Most of the energy he obtained from Extraction was sent right to the Elemental Empress, allowing her to kill more than 400 Kitsun in half a minute.

Her fire spear charges had been successful and the kill count would continue to increase as time passed. But while the Elemental Empress could attack her enemies freely, Michael had been forced to block the advance of five Low Tier-3 Guards and Awakened. Fortunately, that worked out somewhat fine since he possessed enough energy to create a resilient defense and use his reliable firepower to inflict some damage as well.

His energy level was more or less at par with a Tier-4 Awakened. However, he could replenish his energy as well.

Unfortunately, he was only a single individual fighting against thousands. It was only obvious to see him struggle under the pressure of enemies at and above his rank, especially when they had a numerical advantage.

But with the Elemental Empress by his side, his struggles turned into an opportunity.

As he and the Elemental Empress fought together, their taming bond grew stronger. It grew strong enough for Michael to feel the uncontrollable wrath and fury that was coursing through the Elemental Empress once he and Stinger switched places.

"Not so fast, you disgusting bastards," Michael growled deeply, the Elemental Empress' conscious slowly seeping into the taming bond, rage filling his entire being.

"We're just getting started."

In the next moment, a small part of his consciousness drifted inside the taming bond with the Elemental Empress as well. The Elemental Empress flinched subconsciously as she sensed what was about to happen. She glanced over to Michael, who smiled lightly as he looked at her.

"Trust me."

These two words were all the Elemental Empress had to hear. They carried a much deeper meaning that could only be understood by the Elemental Empress.

The Elemental Empress accepted the minuscule part of Michael's consciousness that drifted into hers. Simultaneously, the portion of her consciousness that had unknowingly entered the taming bond moved toward Michael.

Their consciousness overlapped in response to their actions, and their powers were shared equally. But that was not everything. There was another point, a factor that hadn't been taken into consideration when Sun Demos used Power Share for the first time.

Michael and the Elemental Empress were drawn to each other. A powerful suctioning force existed between the two of them, pulling Michael and the Empress closer.

As they moved closer the energy consumption of Power Share decreased drastically. It was incomparably lower than the massive consumption of energy Sun Demos had required. The distance increased the energy consumption.

Filled with rage and fury equally, and pulled towards each other, the Elemental Empress didn't even realize what was happening as her body expanded naturally. She grew as tall as Michael and her blazing flames began to flicker violently as her form began to change.

The Elemental Empress began to turn into a living torch as she moved closer to Michael until her blazing flames touched him. Her blazing flames engulfed Michael's fingers. The flames slowly traveled to his hand, and up his arm before they shrouded his entire upper body.

The flames continued to move around Michael, engulfing his body like a tight armor; an armor made of fire. Despite the blazing flames all over his body, Michael didn't feel hot. On the contrary, there was a cooling feeling to the flames all over his body. It was a good feeling...a great feeling.

By sharing his power with the Elemental Empress, Michael naturally gained access to her fire element. However, the sensation he felt right now didn't feel like mere access. It was not the same as his control of Soultraits either...but it was weirdly similar.

He gained control of the Elemental Empress' elemental affinities, and his control continued to increase as her blazing body engulfed him like a second skin.

Her form slowly dispersed as the blazing armor set around Michael was compressed. However, she didn't disappear. It was more like the Elemental Empress' consciousness drifted deeper into Michael's mind, fusing their minds and bodies simultaneously.

Michael could feel whatever the Elemental Empress felt, and he could read her mind naturally. The two of them had become one. They had fused into one entity.

Despite the fusion, Michael could tell that he was still in full control of his body. He was the dominant force of the fusion, allowing him to do whatever he pleased as long as the fusion was intact. The Elemental Empress allowed Michael to gain full control of her body. She decided to trust him and allow him to do whatever he wanted under the condition that he would eradicate the Kitsun.

The rage and wrath filling her was enough to temporarily give Michael control of her mind and body. She could tell that Micheal was much stronger than her and that he was more capable of achieving what she desired. If she hesitated only for a moment, or if she didn't trust Michael enough the fusion would be dissolved forcefully. However, the Elemental Empress didn't even think about distrusting Michael right now.

All she desired was the death of the Kitsun Lord and his subjects.

Micheal gained control of the Elemental Empress' elemental attributes. Most were not powerful other than her major attribute, fire, and his understanding of the elements was not that high either. That changed gradually as a wisp of knowledge entered his mind through the Elemental Empress' consciousness. The wisp of knowledge provided Michael with enough information about the elements to control them to a certain degree.

The Elemental Empress' experience would guide him further, allowing him complete control as if he manifested them inside his body months before.

All of a sudden, the Elemental Empress used Enhancement on herself. The blazing armor set expanded and compressed further around Michael, who had to tap into the golden threads of Extraction to accelerate the energy drainage of the injured Kitsun around him.

He then conjured dozens of blazing swords and added a layer of Reinforced Swords Qi to increase the destructive power of the blazing swords, only to further enhance them via Enhancement.

The Elemental Empress' fire affinity grew stronger through Enhancement and so did her outburst. Her power output increased rapidly, only to reach a whole different level as the combined forces of Michael's Soultraits and the Elemental Empress' elements met.

The temperature of the blazing swords increased just before Michael released them with a burst of energy. Sizzling through the air, the blazing swords increased the temperature in the surroundings all while altering the ambient energy ever so slightly. The ambient energy changed slowly into fire-attributed energy that nourished the surroundings.

It was drawn to the Elemental Empress after being altered, who absorbed the attributed energy naturally. With more energy in their fused body, Michael could conjure more blazing swords. But instead of foolishly creating more and more blazing swords without a plan, Michael decided to tap into his strongest and most versatile power; the Power of Extraction.

He created hundreds of tiny golden tendrils of Extraction alongside hundreds of blazing spears. He didn't use Enhancement or Reinforced Sword Qi to enhance the blazing spears. Instead, the spears were solely used to attach the golden tendrils of extraction to it.

The tendrils of extraction were easily attached to the fire spears, and they were released without any hesitation. The fire spears shot through the air, passed the strongest Kitsun and impacted heavily on their designated targets.

The fire spears burned through the targets' armors and pierced through their bodies – without killing any of them instantly. The targets were blown back and heavily injured, but none of them died. They were left with grave injuries that would kill them in the next few minutes. In the meantime, the tendrils of extraction invaded the targets' bodies and sucked them dry until their energy was extinguished, giving them a miserable death.

Michael extracted their remaining origin energy slowly but steadily while leaving their lifeforce untouched. They should survive a little longer until their energy pool was drained completely. Once they were out of energy, their lives would lose its value. All they had left was their lifeforce to make sure that Michael would never lose his vigor mid-battle. He could devour their lifeforce with Extraction after all.

The designated targets Michael had aimed at were the remaining Tier-1 Summons, the lightly injured Guards and Awakened, and those Kitsun further in the back. Since the Kitsun in the back didn't expect to be struck heavily in the chest, they were met by surprise when a reddish-orange flash hit them. Hit off-guard, all they could do was struggle against the burning sensation as their chest was pierced.

'All my powers increased by more than 30%. Even my Soultraits are much stronger now... The Elemental Empress' mythical fire is also much stronger now that we are fused. Is that the power of the Elemental Empress, a being that could be considered a Pseudo Mythical Existence?'

Michael had never felt this powerful before. Fusing with the Elemental Empress granted him the power he yearned for; the power he needed to fight the Kitsun head-on.

The Summons and Awakened he struck with the spears conjured from the Elemental Empress' mythical fire couldn't do anything but struggle against the burning sensation that spread throughout their bodies, slowly burning them alive.

Meanwhile, the tendrils of extraction leached on their energy storages. They were drained rapidly, creating more energy for Michael, whose body was overflowing with energy. The blazing armor set continued to expand as the energy within Michael continued to increase. It was like the blazing armor was an external energy storage that could also be used to keep most enemies at bay. After all, the armor set was also made from mythical fire.

The Elemental Empress' entire body was made of mythical fire that could burn everyone at her rank with a simple touch. Being fused with Michael, the mythical fire burned all enemies at and beneath Low Tier-2 easily. All Michael had to do was to give the flames the command to do so.

But Michael didn't.

He was in need of the Tier-2 Summons. Michael needed their energy and lifeforce to deal with the remaining enemies. Thousands of Kitsun might have died, but more than ten thousand were still left to be killed.

Furthermore, Michael had yet to deal with all Kitsun at the 3rd Tier. Many Awakened with considerable strength were left as well. And then there were still the Tier-3 Awakened who exceeded the Lowest and Low rank.

There were a handful of Peak Tier-3 Awakened, and a Peak Tier-3 Kitsun Lord to deal with.

Michael required every bit of power and energy he could use to eliminate them.

Otherwise, he would be the one who ended up dead.

Chapter 393 Killstealer

Kitsun were sly and treacherous, but Michael learned one particular thing about their mindset; they were afraid of pain.

Even though they loved to inflict pain and watch others suffer, no Kitsun liked to feel pain. They were hypocrites of the highest level, and they would lose their desire for combat quickly at the possibility of sustaining injuries.

Their mindset and constitution turned the Kitsun into one of the worst types of combatants. However, that flaw was made up for by their high fertility, their fast maturity circle that spanned less than two years, and the fact that they were both business-minded and focused on enslaving monsters and other races to fight for them.

But that was exactly where Michael held an advantage over the Kitsun. The nearby Beast Ranches were destroyed, and the slaves that had been trained for combat were now dead. The Elemental Empress and her Elementals had been the Kitsun Lord's main strength in terms of Battle Slaves, after all.

Therefore, all that was left were the Kitsun Guards and Awakened.

Conjuring hundreds of fire spears with the Elemental Empress' aid, Michael attached tendrils of extraction to them before he released them with a burst of energy. The fire spears propelled through the air and pierced through the steel armors and chests of the targets, leaving them gravely hurt – but far from dead.

The tendrils of extraction invaded the gravely injured Kitsun and extracted their energy for Michael to annex. Using the annexed energy, Michael possessed enough energy to face the onslaught of Tier-3 Guards and Awakened. No more than 500 Awakened and around 200 combatants at the 3rd Tier were left behind for him to tackle.

The only issue was that not all Tier-3 Awakened were easy to deal with even with the energy he hoarded.

His combat prowess after fusing with the Elemental Empress was clearly on par with a Mythical Existence. His Soultraits and the Elemental Empress' Powers allowed him to fight enemies above his Tier without too many difficulties. He could thus be considered a Tier-2 Mythical Lord.

As for the Kitsun, their combat prowess was Inferior. It was weaker than the average Awakened at the same Rank and Tier.

Thunder crackled in the sky, and crimson roots shot out of the ground. The crimson roots coiled around Michael's leg but quickly caught fire when they came in touch with the mythical fire armor that shrouded him tightly. Nonetheless, the crimson roots were sturdy enough to hold Michael in place for a second.

It was long enough for a bolt of thunder to blast down from the sky and travel towards him with a tremendous speed.

Michael's eyes narrowed at the course of events. His body glowed golden, and he vanished. A tremendous amount of energy was consumed but Michael used the Elemental Empress' spatial affinity to jump through space. His understanding of the spatial affinity was minuscule, but it was just enough to warp him three meters through the air.

He escaped the crimson roots and began to charge into his enemies right after using six layers of Enhancement on his body to enhance his physical strength. His constitution reached an entirely new level, but this didn't come without a downside. Using Enhancement on himself strained his body quite a lot. One wouldn't notice the strain too much with one or two layers of Enhancement, but six layers of Enhancement were too much to handle for Michael's body.

The only reason why his body wasn't ripped apart due to the sudden increase in Strength and Agility was his high refinement degree. All the work, effort, and money he spent on his body refinement had been worth it. He could increase his Strength and Agility to be on par with another Human at the Peak of the 2nd Tier. That was more than enough to deal with the enemies around him.

More bolts of lightning burst down from the sky, crimson roots emerged from the ground, and mental attacks struck him heavily. And if that was less, barriers and shields emerged in front of him, trying to block his path, and elemental attacks poured down on him like there was no tomorrow.

There were even Kitsun Awakened with similar transformation Soultraits like Tiara's Silvarean Tiger. Michael saw an Awakened transform his inferior physique into that of a Minotaur – to a certain extent at least. The Awakened's combat prowess skyrocketed, but Michael didn't give the Kitsun Awakened a chance to finish his transformation.

Michael released a four-fold enhanced Qi Blaze Sword toward the Awakened in the middle of his transformation. The attack burst straight through his chest, reaching his heart where the blazing mythical fire burned down everything obstructing its path.

Using the surplus of energy surging through his body, Michael easily controlled the battlefield around him. Exploiting the power of his Eagle Eyes and Spirit Gaze and the lethality of enhanced Spirit Disturbance, Michael could temporarily weaken Tier-3 Guards before finishing them off with an enhanced Qi Blaze Sword.

Michael grew more adept at using the Elemental Empress' powers with time, but the fights grew increasingly more difficult as well. That was why, whenever he felt a tinge of mental, or physical tiredness, he annexed the lifeforce of those he had left alive with the intention to sap them dry once needed.

Nonetheless, Michael's focus grew weaker as time passed, and the pain in his head intensified. Maintaining the fusion with the Elemental Empress all while using her elements and several Soultraits in an exaggerated manner was far from easy.

The tendrils of Extraction may not require much of his focus, but that didn't mean they could be left without supervision.

Being fused with the Elemental Empress didn't really increase his focus either. In fact, it was the opposite. Her rage and fury distracted Michael far more than they helped in the battle.

Thus, the following hours on the battlefield were more of a struggle to stay alive, keep his energy storage filled to the brim, and ensure that his stamina would never run out. As long as he was alive, he could wear down his enemies. Once dead everything would be over...and that was not something Michael wanted to happen – obviously.

All while Michael fought with his life on the line, killing thousands of Kitsun in a matter of hours, his War Rune was churning. The energy influx of everyone he had killed over the last few hours had entered his War Rune, which tried to refine the energy influx as quickly as possible. Michael's War Rune was refined rapidly, but it would take hours, if not days for all energy influx and energy shares to be digested.

Unfortunately, Michael didn't have that much time. He was already in the middle of the final battle.

He was faced with seven Awakened at the 3rd Tier, two of them being at the Peak of the 3rd Tier. Their Soultraits were too weak to hold a candle against Michael, but their numbers and power were quite high. Using Eagle Eyes and Spirit Gaze to analyze their attack pattern, Michael slipped through the gaps like a slithering serpent.

He evaded their attacks with great precision while searching for an opening to attack as well. Manifesting a few Blaze Swords, he released them without hesitation. The Wyverntooth Spear lunged forward in an attempt to reap a life as well. Unfortunately, his spear was blocked while a series of barriers and shields blocked the Blaze Swords.

Moving closer to one of the Low Tier-3 Inferior Awakened, Micheal tried to utilize his knowledge of the Kitsun race's personality traits to perfection. His tactic worked out more or less. The Peak Tier-3 Inferior Awakened continued to target Michael without caring about his brethren who were nearby. The attacks struck weaker Tier-3 Kitsun heavily, only for Michael to have warped three meters behind the same Kitsun.

An enhanced Qi Blaze Sword had manifested in his palm, and it burst forth, piercing straight into the back of the Kitsun, who had just been hit by his own brethren. Michael killed the Kitsun and received another energy influx. However, the number of enemies didn't seem to decrease.

On the contrary, the dead Kitsun was immediately replaced by two more Kitsun.

'Fuck this nonsense... Can't they just form a line to get killed one by one?' Michael cursed, gritting his teeth at the arrival of the two Kitsun. They were not Awakened, but Tier-3 Summons. Unfortunately, that did little to improve Michael's situation.

The only thing that improved Michael's mood was the gossiping Kitsun. They had yet to enter close combat against Michael because their superiors were in the middle of the battle, but that didn't matter. All Michael cared about was the content of their gossip.

"The Kitsun Lord commanded us to hasten up. The Valyr have already barged past the border watchtower. The other Lords are also on their way here," One of them whispered to his comrade, only for the other Kitsun to growl loudly.

"We need to finish this bastard quickly! Our settlements cannot fall...or we will fall..."

'The neighboring Lords finally started to move? Why did they take so long, either way?!' Michael asked himself before his focus moved back to the battle.

He spent another half an hour struggling to kill a few more Tier-3 Guards, and a few hundred weaker Kitsun. In the meantime, Michael sustained a few injuries as well. The Elemental Empress' mythical fire armor absorbed the impact of most attacks rather easily, but not everything could be blocked.

Some attacks were softened but they reached his skin and flesh nonetheless.

One of his arms was mangled, leaving Michael wondering whether the bones had just cracked or if they had shattered into countless pieces. All Michael knew was that he had difficulties moving his arm without searing pain shooting up from his shoulder blade.

But the injury was of little concern since the forces of the neighboring Lords arrived at last.

"The kill stealers have arrived," Michael scoffed.

"A little late, but that seems to be normal for those who want to reap the benefits of the hard work of others."

Chapter 394 Backup

The thought of getting his prey stolen by the other Lords didn't sit right with Michael, but he was too tired to complain about help.

He would rather accept some help in the last leg of the final battle against the Kitsun Lord instead of dying against him. His right arm was badly crushed, and his headache was getting worse. Not even absorbing the lifeforce of the Kitsun he had injured before was of much help.

The lifeforce eased the pain in his head a little bit, but it primarily focused on tending to his wounded arm. Michael's right arm was hanging down limply. He couldn't even move it at this point. But even worse was that his fusion with the Elemental Empress was about to dissolve.

It grew increasingly difficult to focus on their fused state, which was mostly caused by one particular fact; Michael was growing tired and hesitant to charge mindlessly into the masses of powerful Tier-3 Kitsun, while the Elemental Empress was willing to sacrifice her life as long as she could kill as many Kitsun as possible.

Their wavelength had matched before, but over the course of six hours of battling Michael changed his mind. The instant his right arm was crushed, Michael knew that he couldn't continue like this. He knew that he would have to retreat if he sustained any more injuries.

That was why he was glad when he first heard about the arrival of the neighboring Lords' forces. He didn't know much about the Valyr Lordess and the two other Lords, but what he had learned was more than enough to know that Michael and the three Lords were on the same side; they all hated the Kitsun Lord.

His information about the Lords and their subjects originated from the Kitsun's Memory Orbs that Michael had digested before the battle. A few battles between the Valyr and the Kitsun could be seen in the snippets of memories he had digested and they showed how much the Valyr hated the Kitsun race.

The first time Michael recalled the snippets he thought that the Valyr hated him because the Memory Orbs of the Kitsun he digested made him think that the Kitsun's memories belonged to him. It had been terrifying.

Fortunately, they hated not him but the Kitsun, whose memories he digested.

While thinking about the forces sent by the three Lords, Michael ended up getting distracted. It was only for a quarter of a second, but that was enough for the Awakened opposite him to grasp the opening and strike simultaneously.

Crimson roots shot out of the ground, locking him on the spot for a quarter of a second. Afterward, a grey dome shrouded him and everyone else in a radius of five meters. Michael couldn't use the Empress' elements in the grey dome. It felt like his access to the elements of the universe had been abruptly cut off.

The grey dome would disperse a few seconds later, but that was more than enough for the Kitsun Awakened to appear in front of Michael and brandish their blades.

Michael used seven layers of Enhancement on his body to temporarily reinforce his strength. Then he conjured a Qi Sword to cut the roots that had coiled around his legs.

Since he couldn't control any elements right now, Michael couldn't even conjure a Glacicle. Fortunately, Reinforced Sword Qi was not considered an element in that regard. The same could be said about Eagle Eyes and Spirit Gaze. They were no natural elements and could be used in the grey dome.

Michael continued to use Eagle Eyes and Spirit Gaze to observe his enemies' movements in great detail. He was pushed back but could prevent sustaining grave injuries for the time being as he dodged the rapidly incoming attacks.

He was just about to unleash the Dome of Extraction and up his game a little to initiate a counterattack as soon as he found an opening when a red flash shot past him.

A sonorous humming reverberated through the surroundings as a crimson flash cut through the air, severing the head of a nearby Kitsun Awakened.

The Awakened didn't even realize what had hit him when his head rolled over the ground.

A fountain of warm blood gushed through the surroundings, onto a young woman wielding a crimson longsword.

"Who are you?" Michael asked subconsciously even though he had already a fair inkling of who the unknown woman was. The memories of the Valyr race were still crystal clear in his mind.

The woman stared at Michael with a deep frown. Her darkish-red eyes locked with Michael's dark eyes. They widened in surprise as if she realized something.

"Wait, you're not a Valyr?" She asked.

Michael was momentarily stunned. He looked at the unknown woman and raised an eyebrow.

The woman looked quite like a human woman if not for various indicators suggesting otherwise. She had red skin that matched almost perfectly to her red steel armor. A black Morningstar tail grew out of her tailbone and blazing flames replaced most of her black hair. Two short black horns and a long purplish horn jut from her forehead, drawing lots of attention to them.

However, the most impressive was the bloody-red leathery wings that the woman spread out proudly.

"Do I look like one of you?" Michael asked after he analyzed the woman's appearance for a moment.

Now the woman observed him intently for a few seconds. Blazing flames coated Michael's body, but the skin beneath his flames was not red. He didn't have any horns either, let alone wings or a Morningstar tail.

"Not really..." The woman answered, pushing past Michael to slice through a Tier-3 Awakened with ease.

Her movements were highly efficient and pleasant to the eye. She moved gracefully without any unnecessary actions. Her actions made Michael wonder when he would be able to find a high-ranked combat technique suitable for him.

'As long as it's not the Wicked Spear Arts, I'll be fine with anything of decent quality,' Michael mused before he conjured an enhanced Qi Sword that shot past the unknown woman.

The head of three Peak Tier-2 Guards burst apart, attracting the unknown woman's attention. She looked back at Michael with a tinge of envy in her eyes.

"Looks like you have a good Soultrait, stranger," The woman said, not even trying to hide her envy, "We're also attacking the same bastard, so how about we fight together for a while?"

Michael raised an eyebrow, but he wasn't against teaming up with the unknown woman. He was already quite tired. Teaming up with someone as powerful as this young woman didn't seem like a bad idea.

"My name is Michael. You must belong to one of the three neighboring territories. Seems like you got my note," Michael said lightly as he continued conjuring enhanced Qi Swords to throw at the enemies around them.

"That was you? Interesting," The woman mused, feeling embarrassed that she hadn't figured it out sooner, "I'm Zira, the daughter of the Valyr Lordess."

"Nice meeting you. But let's stop chit-chatting for the time being. These sadistic disgusts won't wait for us to finish our chat," Michael said, pointing at the Peak Tier-3 Awakened in front of them with his unscathed arm.

The grey dome dispersed, allowing Michael to use the Elemental Empress' affinities once again. This time it hurt a lot more to use her affinities, but Michael tried to maintain his fused state with the Empress a little longer.

["Now that reinforcement has arrived we can focus on killing everyone. Calm down a little bit and follow my guidance. I will make sure that we survive and kill the Kitsun Lord. Just trust me and believe in your own power!"]

Michael tried to talk to the Elemental Empress and motivate her a little bit, but that was not as efficient as he had hoped to be. The splitting pain in his head eased a little and it was a bit easier to use the Empress' affinities once again, but the Empress was about to lose her patience.

They had to hurry, otherwise, the Elemental Empress would wreak havoc in the fused state and Michael didn't know what would happen to him then.

"I like the way you're thinking, Michael. Let's kill those disgusting bastards!" Zira applauded with a tinge of excitement in her voice.

She turned back to the enemies and changed her posture. The enchantments all over Zira's Artifacts began to glow as she activated them. In the next moment, she burst forward and turned into a flash.

Her steps were nimble and extremely fast. She left behind a trail of flames on the ground as she moved and cut through her opponents, ignoring the Soultraits that were activated and released upon her.

A weak shimmer coated Zira's red skin. It covered her entire body, but Michael couldn't pinpoint what exactly the shimmer did at first.

Only after he watched her for a few seconds did he realize what she was doing.

'Her Soultrait absorbs a portion of the incoming attacks and turns them into energy. That's great...if not for the horrible conversion rate. Is that a 2-Star Soultrait? No. It's probably a 1-Star Soultrait.'

Michael couldn't quite understand why Zira focused on her Soultrait almost obsessively. She endangered her life for the sake of using her Soultrait in battle. It didn't make sense for her to use the Soultrait and jump into her enemies' attacks. After all, she still sustained injuries and barely got any energy back in return.

Michael was pretty sure that the energy consumption to maintain her Soultrait was higher than the energy she received from the incoming attacks.

All she gained was injuries and a loss of energy. Going by her performance, Zira shouldn't even bother using her Soultrait, in the first place.

However, watching her fight desperately using her Soultrait and recalling the envy in her eyes when he used the enhanced Qi Sword, Michael realized something.

'No matter how great your innate talent is...Soultraits are still the core of your combat prowess.'

Some people grew powerful by relying on unique techniques and their tireless efforts not to fall behind the truly powerful. However, they were fated to never surpass those with excellent Soultraits. It had been their destiny to awaken a low-ranked Soultrait and to stay beneath the truly gifted.

But what if someone with the powers to change fate existed? Someone with the powers to grant and strengthen Soultraits?

'Creating my own army of hard-working Adventurers who'd been forsaken by fate....that doesn't sound too bad.'

Chapter 395 Cloud Domain

After the reinforcement of the three neighboring Lords arrived, Michael began to use bits of his focus to store away the corpses of those he and his people had killed.

He couldn't be sure how amiable the other Lords and their forces would be and if they would allow him to take away the prey that was rightfully his. Thus, Michael stored the corpses whenever he retracted the tendrils of Extraction that had anchored in the corpses of those he killed before.

Paving a way through the rows of enemies with Zira allowed him to store the corpses of the Guards and Awakened killed through Mika's duplicated heirloom arrows as well.

Michael helped clean up the battlefield, which allowed Zira and the other Valyr to use more space to fight the Kitsun. The force of the Valyr Lordess was only a little bit over 1,000 Blaze Warriors and Awakened, but almost all of them were either at the Peak of the 2nd Tier or already at the 3rd Tier.

Their combat prowess was several times higher than the Kitsun as well, granting them the power they required to fight up to five Kitsun simultaneously.

As for Zira, her combat prowess was even higher. She could be considered an Elite as her combat prowess was above average, even though her Soultrait was more of a burden than a useful utensil.

Watching Zira's combat style demonstrated clearly that Michael relied too much on his Soultraits. He could be much stronger if he learned a proper martial arts technique and a movement technique. If learned to a high degree, the techniques could be adjusted to boost their potency with the use of his Soultraits. This would further elevate his combat prowess.

"Where is the Kitsun Lord?" Zira asked loudly, her grumbling voice traveling through the rows behind her.

The forces of the Valyr Lordess had caught up with Zira, and they fought violently, using unique movement techniques that left behind trails of fire to accelerate their movement speed.

None of the Valyr answered Zira. They were busy dealing with the Kitsun in front of them. The forces of the two other neighboring Lords were doing the same. However, they attacked from different sides to ensure that they had the Kitsun Lord surrounded.

Michael had been trying to use the Empress' spatial affinity to warp behind a few Kitsun Awakened to kill them while the Valyr distracted them. Unfortunately, it seemed like the neighboring Lords used a device to block all spatial fluctuations to ensure that the Kitsun Lord couldn't flee anymore.

Therefore, Michael was forced to stay near the frontlines where he would conjure enhanced Qi Blaze Swords to kill all Awakened in his sight. He would then use the remnants of energy left behind inside the Awakened corpses to store them away.

The Valyr, who had been fighting the Awakened only for Michael to steal their prey from right under their noses, could only glare daggers at Michael. They didn't dare to say anything because their Lord's daughter respected the unknown stranger.

But Zira's respect was not the only reason why the Valyr decided to respect Michael. They had seen the mountains of corpses as they joined the battle and witnessed the tremendous power Michael's attacks harbored. Even if some of them were confident at blocking one or two of them, they wouldn't be proud of this achievement. After all, it was easy to tell that Michael was merely close to the Mid-rank of the 2nd Tier. Meanwhile, those who could block Michael's attack were all at the 3rd Tier.

"Haro Ki is in the center. He is currently eradicating the forces of the...I think they were called Zynur," Michael said, his eyes shimmering in a silverish-golden sheen.

Michael wanted to kill the Kitsun Lord, but he didn't think that it was necessary to rush anything. Now that the reinforcement of the three neighboring Lords had arrived, Michael could move a little bit slower. He had been fighting for six hours against more than 20,000 Kitsun and killed thousands of them. Thus he decided to slow down a little and let the newcomers do some hard work too. Instead of rushing anything, Michael rather acted as a thief to kill all Awakened before anyone else could do so.

Killing all Awakened provided far more long-term benefits than rushing through the last forces of the Kitsun Lord just to struggle to kill the Kitsun Lord.

Haro Ki might as well struggle to fight against the forces of the neighboring Lords and tire out before Michael would deal the finishing blow.

"The Zynur are getting killed? These idiots! Have they already forgotten that the Kitsun Lord's Soultrait is highly effective against them?!?" Zira cursed aloud.

She kicked the ground beneath her and propelled herself high into the air. Right after she reached the highest point in her jump, Zira looked around to pinpoint the location of the Kitsun Lord and the Zynur's forces. And it did not take her long to spot them on the other side of the battlefield.

The forces of the Zynur Lord could barely be seen. Everything was covered in a humongous cloud; the same cloud that formed the lower body of the Kitsun race. It was just that the humongous black cloud was...humongous.

It enveloped the majority of the Zynur Lord's forces and continued to expand at the Kitsun Lord's will. The black cloud devoured the oxygen and origin energy in its surroundings, restraining the use of

Soultraits, the ability to breathe while being caught inside the smoke, and it grew increasingly more difficult for those trapped inside to see farther than three meters through the haze of the black cloud.

Pinpointing the location of the Kitsun Lord was extremely difficult and time didn't play in favor of the Kitsun Lord's enemies. But they could at least roughly gauge his location. The Kitsun Lord was definitely somewhere in the middle of the humongous black cloud. After all, he could command the cloud to release back energy and oxygen to keep his energy storage replenished and his oxygen level at a comfortable level.

"We have to kill him before it's too late! If we allow him to keep expanding his Cloud Domain we won't be able to kill him this time either!!" Zira shouted. I think you should take a look at

Michael didn't say anything. He rather listened to the other Valyr nearby, who murmured to himself, "Will we ever be able to kill this monster? How many comrades will his Cloud Domain kill before we can finally stop him!? Too many people died already..."

The Valyr seemed to be in a mid-life crisis as he saw the black cloud expanding on the horizon at the other side of the battlefield. His heart skipped a beat, and the same could be said about the other Valyr. Their fighting spirit and morale plummeted as they witnessed how rapidly the Cloud Domain expanded.

At first, Michael was a little confused. He couldn't understand why everyone would be that worried about the black cloud. However, it quickly dawned upon him that the black cloud – the Kitsun Lord's Cloud Domain – was a horrifying issue for people other than Michael.

If one couldn't find and kill the Kitsun Lord in time, the black cloud would suffocate everybody slowly but surely. Even if one could find the Kitsun Lord, one wouldn't be able to conjure anything from the surroundings that were sucked dry of energy. The black cloud would devour the conjured object's energy before it could be used against the Kitsun Lord, either way.

Yet, the Kitsun Lord could control the black cloud at will. He could do as he pleased since he never encountered an enemy capable of destroying his Cloud Domain. It was the perfect tool against the masses of enemies that threatened him in the past and the present.

The Cloud Domain was the sole reason why the Kitsun Lord could expand his territory so quickly, and why he had never been defeated even though his subordinates and Awakened were ranked inferior in terms of combat prowess.

Not even the races ranked Common, or Elite in terms of combat prowess could do anything against him.

That was the true extent of power; The power only he, the Kitsun Lord, possessed!!

"If you can promise to give me the corpse of the Kitsun Lord, and everyone I've killed on the battlefield, I can give you a helping hand," Michael said while terminating his fusion with the Elemental Empress.

The mind-splitting headache had been too much to endure after several hours of being fused. Therefore, Michael and the Elemental Empress decided to end it. Slowly the Mythical Fire Armor Set detached from his body. It morphed back into the Elemental Empress' shape right in front of him.

Observing how the fire coating Michael reshaped itself to turn into the Elemental Empress, Zira was momentarily stunned. She completely forgot about the Elemental Empress, and the original appearance of the unknown Lord, who had infiltrated the Kitsun Lord's territory not even three days ago.

The Elemental Empress was exhausted, and her head slumped down on Michael's shoulder where she decided to lean on for some time.

Michael was at least as exhausted as the Elemental Empress, but he couldn't allow himself a break just yet. He had to continue even if it was not for much longer.

"His corpse? I don't think my mother cares about his corpse. As long as we kill the Kitsun Lord with your help, we can even give you the bodies of the Kitsun we've killed. I don't think the Zynur or Laprix care about the Kitsun's bodies as long as Haro Ki dies a miserable death!" Zira rolled her eyes.

Wasn't it obvious that the death of the Kitsun Lord was a thousandfold more important than some disgusting Kitsun corpses? The Valyr had no use for them. Their only use was their death. Unfortunately, the Cloud Domain was not that easy to bypass no matter how inferior the Kitsun race's combat prowess ought to be.

But Michael broke into a vibrant smile contrary to Zira's expectations of seeing him argue.

"That's a deal! Don't disappoint me later," Michael said, draining the energy within every Kitsun he had invaded with tendrils of Extraction.

From one moment to the next, Michael's body began overflowing with energy.

Then he applied Enhancement on Extraction several times.

"I will give you guys only one opportunity. You better take it...cause I'm dead-tired already!"

Chapter 396 Final Blow

Once six layers of Enhancement had been applied to the Symbol of Extraction, Michael utilized Extraction immediately.

He created tens of tendrils of Extraction that were as thick as his upper arm. The tendrils of Extraction shot toward the strongest Kitsun that had already been injured while the rest shot into the surrounding area where they tapped into the streams of ambient energy.

Michael didn't show any mercy as he willed the tendrils of Extraction to annex the streams of ambient energy in the surroundings and both the energy and lifeforce within his enemies.

The lifeforce soothed his splitting headache and eased the pain in his right arm, while the extracted origin energy was annexed and put to good use by conjuring more tendrils of Extraction.

Feeling a tremendous amount of energy surging through every cell in his body, Michael began to stride toward the ever-expanding Cloud Domain of the Kitsun Lord.

He merely turned to Zira for a second to give her a short notice, "My Soultrait allows me to devour the energy in my enemies and surroundings. Don't think too much about the restrictions created by the Cloud Domain and give your best to kill this piece of shit."

Zira stared at him in shock, her mouth wide open. She thought that Michael's Soultrait had been something otherworldly, only to realize that her naive mind had fooled her.

Michael didn't possess only one powerful Soultrait...but multiple!

The envy in her eyes intensified as realization sunk in. There was nothing she could do about that. Zira had always been jealous of those born with a great innate gift, and powerful Soultraits. Her innate talent wasn't bad, but it wasn't good enough to allow her to outweigh the disadvantage of possessing a trashy Soultrait.

"...Alright. We'll pay attention," Zira mumbled once she got back to her senses.

But by the time she replied, Michael had already walked past her, his golden tendrils infiltrating those who had been injured by her and her people.

Michael didn't leave much behind once his tendrils of Extraction brushed past his enemies. But that was only given. Extraction was a 6-Star Soultrait with six layers of Enhancement.

However, Michael didn't bother sparing a glance to the enemies around him anymore. He focused on annexing as much energy as possible to apply two more layers on Enhancement before he reached the Cloud Domain.

The Cloud Domain was even larger than Michael expected. It was more than 50 meters in height and easily crossed the majority of the battlefield by now. That meant the Cloud Domain was more than a kilometer in width and length at this point.

'Now I understand why everyone was so worried about the Cloud Domain. This is truly deadly. If not for Extraction, I would have been forced to run away.'

Those with Soultraits and Willpower far stronger than the Kitsun Lord would be able to use their energy to use their Soultraits, but the Kitsun Lord was at the Peak of the 3rd Tier and he was about to evolve to a Higher Lifeform by advancing to Tier-4. His Willpower couldn't be weak, and his Soultrait was certainly on the stronger side as well.

Therefore, nobody had been able to defeat the Kitsun Lord until now. That was about to change.

"Follow me!" Michael commanded Zira and the Valyr following her.

"Hold tightly," He said to the Elemental Empress, who tightened her grasp over his arm.

Michael didn't look back at Zira and the other Valyr to see if they were following him, but dashed straight toward the Cloud Domain without any hesitation. The tendrils of Extraction retracted and Michael used the energy he gained to release the Dome of Extraction.

The Dome of Extraction was activated immediately. It devoured the energy that maintained the Cloud Domain and freed the oxygen that had been held hostage by the black cloud.

The Dome of Extraction could only extract the energy of the Cloud Domain wherever they touched. Thus, the Cloud Domain could still expand even though Michael began to extract it from within. But that was not a problem.

Michael began to expand the Dome of Extraction using the energy he drained from the humongous black cloud. This resulted in a pleasant chain reaction. First, the Dome of Extraction continued to expand rapidly. But most important was the second effect wherein the Cloud Domain stopped expanding.

Deprived of some of its energy, the Cloud Domain was forced to subside the energy it had just lost, resulting in stagnant growth. The moment Zira and the Valyr noticed this phenomenon they followed Michael's trails and charged inside the Cloud Domain.

At first, they didn't believe that Michael would be capable of creating an opening to strike the Kitsun Lord, but he proved them wrong – fortunately. After they hesitated for a quarter of a second, they pushed inside the Cloud Domain and reached Michael's Dome of Extraction. The golden dome continued to expand, repelling the Cloud Domain all while devouring its energy rapidly.

At some point, Michael noticed that thousands of Kitsun ended up getting caught in the Cloud Domain as well. He sensed them and a snort escaped his lips. Not even the Kitsun could escape the same fate as their enemies. They required oxygen to survive and suffocated in the Cloud Domain.

Only the Kitsun Lord could survive in his own humongous domain.

"If you're already dying, you might as well turn into my War Rune's nutrition," Michael said before he invaded the inside of the suffocating Kitsun with threads of Extraction. The threads of Extraction protruded from the edges of the Dome of Extraction, and invaded the enemy, draining them slowly until death was all that was left.

Michael was not sure how much time passed before they reached the center of the Cloud Domain. However, once they did, his Dome of Extraction had reached a radius of more than a hundred meters. That was not enough space for 1000 Valyr to fight against the Kitsun Lord. But it was enough space for the Valyr to move in and out of the Cloud Domain without having to fear dying from the lack of oxygen.

The Valyr moved in small groups of 50 members and began to initiate powerful attacks. They took Haro Ki by surprise as the Kitsun Lord didn't expect anyone to be able to overpower his Cloud Domain.

He was already aware that the unknown Lord could repel the weakest state of his black cloud, but he never believed that his Cloud Domain could be repelled and devoured that easily as well. The Cloud Domain was his strongest power; an ability that required the sacrifice of 5,000 Kitsun to be manifested in the first place.

This ability had never failed him. In fact, it always exceeded his expectations!

The Cloud Domain once reaped more than a hundred thousand lives, including the life of a Lord he fought for months before comprehending the true power of the Cloud Domain.

It was not a power one could take lightly because the Cloud Domain could cover entire battlefields once nurtured.

The Kitsun Lord couldn't believe that a power surpassing the Cloud Domain existed in this part of the Origin Expanse. He had never seen anyone with a power like that. It didn't make sense, even less that the user of this power was a mere Lord between the Low and Mid-rank of the 2nd Tier.

How powerful must a Tier-2 Lord's Soultrait be to surpass the true power of his Cloud Domain – manifested by a Lord who was just about to cross the border to the 4th Tier?! What was going on? Who

was this guy? And why did he have to appear just before he evolved to a Higher Lifeform? Couldn't he have waited...just a few more days?

That was not fair...

Michael had no idea how depressed and furious the Kitsun Lord was. He didn't really care either way.

All Michael cared about was maintaining the 100-meter radius of the Dome of Extraction while continuing to extract more and more energy to prepare for his final attack as well.

He was certain that the Valyr could deal with the Kitsun Lord now that the Cloud Domain posed no lethal threat anymore. Nonetheless, Michael wanted to be the one to kill the Kitsun Lord. For one, it was a part of revenge that he owed his subordinates who died in the Elementals Cave. But there was also the vengeance he promised the Elemental Empress.

Michael wanted to show the Elemental Empress that he would always keep his promise and that she didn't have to worry about getting disappointed. He would make sure that this would never happen!

Following that, Michael manifested a huge Glacicle Sword. It was more than ten meters long and two meters wide. Right after the Glacicle Sword manifested, Michael shrouded it with Reinforced Sword Qi.

However, instead of using the Reinforced Sword Qi as he usually did, Michael used the Qi to compress the Glacicle Sword as much as possible. The ten-meter-long sword was compressed into a one meter long blade. Once the Glacicle Sword was compressed, Michael used Glacicle once again to shroud the compressed Qi Glacicle Sword with another layer of Glacicle. Following that, the Glacicle Sword expanded to its former size, only for Michael to use Reinforced Sword Qi once again to compress the Glacicle Sword a second time.

Michael repeated this cycle several times all while hoarding more energy. He watched as the Valyr inflicted several deep gashes all over the Kitsun Lord's body. But in exchange for inflicting injuries, the Kitsun Lord was given a handful of openings to kill the Valyr opposite him.

The Kitsun Lord killed almost 50 Valyr while Michael prepared his final attack. That was a lot more than Michael expected, especially since the combat prowess of almost all Kitsun was ranked Inferior.

Once the Glacicle Sword had been compressed over and over again and coated in several layers of Reinforced Sword Qi it looked like a refined blade of a humongous two-meter-long broadsword. The ice shone like polished steel, which glowed even brighter as Michael used the majority of his hoarded energy to apply seven layers of Enhancement on both the Symbol of Reinforced Sword Qi and Glacicle to finish up the final layer of the highly compressed enhanced Qi Glacicle Blade.

The energy utilized to create this attack was more than most Peak Tier-3 Awakened could hold in their storages, and the time was more than enough to create numerous killing attacks. However, Michael didn't allow anyone to rush him, not even the mind-throbbing headache that had been haunting him for quite a while now.

Michael raised his hand slowly. He retracted the Dome of Extraction in one go before using the entire energy he had just retrieved to supply Extraction. He coated the highly compressed enhanced Qi Glacicle Blade with the Power of Extraction.

In the next instant, his hand shot down in a straight line and the Qi Glacicle Blade burst forth.

"Get out of the way!!" Michael shouted at the top of his lungs as his vision blurred.

Drained of energy, all Michael could witness was the Qi Glacicle Blade cutting through everything in its way.

It froze everything in its path. The blazing trails left behind by the Valyr extinguished at once, and even the flaming hair of the Valyr flickered violently in an attempt to survive the freezing hell that had descended all around them.

The highly compressed enhanced Qi Glacicle Blade released menacing pressure all of a sudden, just before Michael used the last bits of energy and willpower within him to use Spirit Disturbance on the Kitsun Lord.

The Kitsun Lord roared loudly, trying to use Cloud Domain against the Valyr around him to push them away and move aside. But before he could even attempt to do so, multiple new wounds appeared all over their bodies. A quarter of a second later the Glacicle Blade arrived.

The tip cut straight through the center of the Kitsun Lord's chest. He couldn't even resist anymore.

In the next moment all the Valyr around the Kitsun Lord could see was blood, followed right behind by pure terror plastered on the Kitsun Lord's face.

"That can't be..."

Suddenly the Valyr screamed out in pain. The Glacicle Blade cut through the Kitsun Lord and sliced him in two right before bursting apart, releasing a terrifying amount of highly enhanced freezing mist.

The freezing mist shrouded the vicinity at once. It was just about to freeze a few Peak Tier-2 Valyr and even three injured Low-rank Common Tier-3 Awakened to death when Michael retracted the freezing mist more as an instinctive move rather than a planned decision.

Right after, he slumped to the ground, his back drenched in sweat. Breathing heavily, all Michael could feel was the energy influx of the Kitsun Lord reaching his War Rune. It was much stronger than any energy influx he had ever obtained before.

'Maybe I will reach the Mid-rank of Tier-2 once I've digested everythi—...' That was all Michael could think of before the world around him turned dark.

Chapter 397 Gift

Several hours passed before Michael regained consciousness. He still felt like his head was about to burst apart, but his physical condition was much better than before. Even his right arm didn't hurt as much as before.

While pushing his flat hands against the soft ground beneath him, Michael felt that something was odd. He forced his eyes open just to realize that he was lying on a mattress inside a large tent.

'How did I end up here?' Michael wondered before he noticed that the taming bond of the Elemental Empress gently tugged at him.

["Where are you?"] He asked the Empress immediately.

After taking a good glance around the tent, Michael could tell that he was still in the Savannah region. Given the smell that hung in the air, he couldn't be far away from the border settlement of the Kitsun Lord either.

["I'm coming!!"] The Empress responded a moment before she barged through the entrance of the tent.

She threw herself against him and hugged Michael tightly.

"Thank you...thank you for taking revenge for my people!!" The Elemental Empress began to sob bitterly, her hug even tighter than before.

Michael was just about to tell the Elemental Empress that he took revenge for his people as well, but before he could do so, he saw Zira, another Valyr that looked like an older version of Zira, and two unknown men enter the tent.

"You woke up faster than expected," Zira winked at Michael, who raised an eyebrow.

Zira's look-alike stepped forward with a thin smile on her face. She held her hands together and her lips parted as she greeted him. "We're glad that you woke up. My name is Valkyria, but most call me the Valyr Lordess. You must be Michael. The Elemental Empress told us about your actions. You are very brave!"

"...Or foolish," one of the men next to the Valyr Lordess added. His physique looked somewhat humanoid, but it looked like his body was made out of fluids. Michael saw the liquid flow all over his body ceaselessly. He had a reptilian head with long ears and razor-sharp teeth. He had spikes jutting out from his spine and extraordinary long legs that didn't quite fit his proportions.

He was a member of the Laprix race.

His remark earned the man a frown from the Valyr Lordess, who tried not to roll her eyes at him. "He is the sole reason why we could defeat the Kitsun Lord. Even if you think his actions were foolish, you should keep your mouth shut!"

The man, the Lord of the Laprix race in the Savannah region, was about to respond to the Valyr Lordess' outburst, but the Zynur Lord standing next to him held him back.

"She is right. Haro Ki was about to advance to the next Tier and become a Higher Lifeform. If not for this young man's actions – foolish or not – we would have much more trouble defeating the Kitsun Lord. Our losses would have been too high to recover from," The Zynur Lord said before he turned back to Michael.

The Zynur Lord had a silver metallic body. His appearance resembled a werewolf with silver metallic fur covering his skin that was also silver. Additionally, he had silver wings as well, but they looked too heavy to fly around. If Michael was not wrong, the wings were merely decoration. At least, at the Zynur Lord's current level. Maybe he could learn how to fly once he reached a higher Tier.

The Zynur Lord's eyes were ocean-blue and quite large. They stared at Michael intently as he approached the young Lord.

"You seem to be in pain. Let me help you a little," The Zynur Lord said, pressing his cold metallic claw upon Michael's chest.

Michael flinched and was about to pull back when the pain in his head and arm disappeared. Crackling noises rang out from his arm as the bones in his shattered right arm were rejoined and realigned. The sounds were far from pleasant, but Michael could clearly feel that his broken arm was healed, so he ignored his instinct telling him to pull back and stay vigilant.

The Elemental Empress eyed the Zynur Lord warily, ready to strike the moment the Zynur Lord did something foolish and tried to harm her master. However, that time never came. The Zynur Lord fixed Michael's arm and stepped back right after.

"Your arm is fine now. As for your headache...fighting for several hours the way you did must have drained your mental power beyond its limit. Resting a day or two would be the best for you. The headache should be no more after you've rested well. If it continues to bother you, just rest a little longer."

"Thanks," Michael replied, glad that someone was there to heal him.

He didn't really want to travel home with a broken arm. After all, Michael had no idea what awaited him on his way back home. Hopefully not much.

["By the way. Where is Stinger?"] Michael asked the Elemental Empress via telepathy. The Elemental Empress turned to him and smiled lightly.

["Sun Demos told me that Tiara and the Forest Elves might need the Golden Stinger Wasp. I am not sure what happened, but it seemed important. So I sent it back home."] She informed him.

"You can communicate with Sun Demos?" Michael blurted aloud, staring at his second tamed subject in surprise. He didn't know that the taming bonds worked like that.

Michael had been certain that Sun Demos and the Elemental Empress could only communicate with him telepathically, not with each other but that didn't seem to be the case.

["After our fusion I was able to hear Sun Demos' voice. He was worried when he sensed through the bond that you collapsed. I reassured him that everything is fine and that there is no need to worry. That was a good thing, right?"]

The Elemental Empress sounded worried. For a moment, she feared if she had done something to irk her master. Luckily, Michael just scoffed in response. He found it hard to believe that the Elemental Empress was the same as before. It seemed like having taken her revenge removed the heavy weight she had been shouldering since the death of her people.

The Elemental Empress was finally free. She could do whatever she wanted without having to fear getting tortured, or that Michael would chain her to some wall until the end of time. Michael would never do something like that. That was something the Elemental Empress figured out during the last few days.

Michael would rather jump into dangers head-first than let his people sacrifice themselves instead.

Michael was just about to ask the Elemental Empress why Tiara and the others needed Stinger's help, but he noticed the confusion in the eyes of the three Lords and Zira. Thus, he changed the topic.

"How long was I asleep?" He asked first.

"You have been out for almost 24 hours. But that was to be expected. The attacks you released were far above your Tier. I don't quite understand how you did it, but you cut the Kitsun Lord in half while you're only a Low-Mid Tier-2 Lord. Your combat prowess must be ranked Mythical if not higher!" Zira answered, trying to hide the envy in her voice.

However, her eyes gave her away and Michael noticed the jealous gaze directed at her. The Valyr Lordess scolded her daughter and pulled her back in the next second.

"Putting aside your monstrous combat prowess, we would like to thank you properly for attacking the Kitsun Lord. Others would have avoided the Kitsun Lord and his territory until they grew a little stronger. But not you. You attacked the Kitsun Lord even though you are only a Lord at the 2nd Tier. That is why we felt obliged to thank you properly, not only as the Lords but also in the name of everyone you rescued from the Kitsun Lord's disgusting clutches!" The Valyr Lordess said to Michael, handing him a small satchel.

Michael accepted the satchel and eyed it in his hands. After a few seconds, he channeled some energy inside the satchel. His eyes widened in shock and he looked at the three Lords with great surprise.

"A non-Artifact storage device?! It has so much space as well...wow..." Michael's eyes shone excitedly. He had a Spatial Pouch Artifact, and the War Rune's storage space. However, their combined storage space was at most a quarter of the non-Artifact storage satchel.

'They stored all corpses inside the satchel as well...even the Kitsun Lord's corpse is inside. Amazing!'

"Since you know the rarity of the satchel, we hope that you're satisfied with it. A quarter of the annual funds of all our territories was used to purchase the satchel for you. That is the least we can do to show our gratitude. Your help was far more important than you might realize!" The Zynur Lord gave him a short bow to express his gratitude.

He wasn't even trying to hide that the Kitsun Lord would have caused much more problems if not for Michael. Instead, he remained truthful – to a certain extent.

'Spending a quarter of your annual funds is much better than losing your territory against the Kitsun Lord. That is quite...obvious,' Michael thought, suppressing a light chuckle.

Michael had never planned on demanding anything from the three Lords – other than the Kitsun corpses – but if they were willing to gift him something, why wouldn't he accept the present?

"It can be accessed by everything, so that is a little downside. But you can also use that to your advantage," Zira added, earning herself glares from the three Lords.

But Michael just nodded, "That's the downside of non-artifact storage devices. It's normal that they don't have a seal."

"Is there something else we can help you with?" The Valyr Lordess inquired, suddenly feeling pressured because of her own daughter's continued stupidity.

Michael thought about it for a moment and tilted his head. There was something he wanted to talk about, but he was not sure how the three Lords would react. The three Lords seemed amiable with each other, but he didn't know what would happen now that their common enemy had been killed.

But at the end of the day, Michael had to know the answer to the question that flashed through his mind over and over again,

"What are you planning to do with the Kitsun Lord's territory?"

Chapter 398 Nightmare Horse

"What are you planning to do with the Kitsun Lord's territory?"

Michael's question was answered with silence. The silence lasted too long for his liking. It made him feel that he shouldn't have asked this question. The discomfort within him grew even more when the three Lords looked at each other for a few seconds only to return their attention back to him. Their intense gazes locked on him, leaving him confused and unsure what they wanted.

'They don't expect me to answer my own question, do they?' Michael wondered as awkwardness filled the entire tent.

"Whatever you guys are planning to do... How about you stay out of the Untamed Jungle? I don't really want to fight with the three of you for the Untamed Jungle. That doesn't feel right after we fought together against the Kitsun Lord."

Even though he would have preferred to receive an answer from them, the three Lords looked reluctant to state their opinion. They knew that Michael worked the hardest to kill the Kitsun Lord. Their help was nothing more than a little push and clean-up.

"That's all you wa—..." Zira asked, just to get interrupted by her own mother. She covered Zira's mouth with her hand and smiled thankfully at Michael.

"Forests like the Untamed Jungle are not really one of our most favored environments to be honest with you. We wouldn't want to infiltrate the Untamed Jungle, either way," The Valyr Lordess revealed with a genuine and vibrant smile on her lips.

"We will split the Kitsun Lord's territory in the Savannah region amongst the three of us. You can keep the Untamed Jungle for yourself," The Zynur Lord said before adding, "Of course, I hope we can stay in contact and establish some trading routes. If you want to nurture the Elemental Empress properly, she will have to use her surplus energy to create more Elemental Cores. By then, you should give her a portion of your territory to create her own society. Or merge her society with your people – though that won't be too easy."

"Either way, with the Elemental Empress by your side, your territory will naturally produce elemental crystals and elemental seeds. If you ever want to trade them, send me a message. I will offer you a good price," The Zynur Lord suggested, retrieving a communication crystal from his storage space.

He handed the communication crystal to Michael and smiled lightly – which looked extremely vicious on the Zynur's face. The Valyr Lordess and the Laprix Lord didn't hesitate to retrieve a pair of communication crystals as well. They said something similar to the Zynur Lord and handed Michael one of their communication crystals.

Michael didn't really care about the Savannah region. He was already busy enough with his small settlement in the Untamed Jungle. However, trading with the three Lords sounded rather nice.

Now that the Kitsun Lord was dead, Michael and the three Lords felt much better. Michael didn't have to worry about his territory getting attacked by the sly and treacherous Kitsun, while the three Lords wouldn't have to worry about getting annihilated. The tension the three Lords had felt for the last few years finally subsided, replaced by freedom and the open question about their territories' future development.

They could expand their territory quite a bit as well!

'Didn't I forget to mention something? What did I want to say?' Michael scratched the back of his head while trying to recall the fact..

"Oh, I just thought of another condition," He said when it finally hit him. The three Lords frowned in unison but Michael waved his hand, telling the Lords to calm down a little bit, "It's nothing major. I just want to make sure that we're on the same side about this point. I want to get rid of all Kitsun. So, none of us will be allowed to turn the Kitsun into their Slaves, or anything like that...just kill them!!"

Michael didn't want to give the Kitsun an opportunity to survive, increase their population rapidly, and potentially revolt against the Lords, killing them, and creating their own native territory where Lords and Awakened of the Kitsun race could spawn and grow strong enough to manifest their War Rune.

To make sure that no more Kitsun like Haro Ki ever saw the light of the day again, they would have to eliminate all Kitsun.

But that was not the sole reason Michael wanted to get rid of the Kitsun. It was also for revenge; the Elemental Empress' revenge.

The death of the Kitsun Lord eased the Empress' anger quite a bit. However, there were still remnants of fury burning deep inside her. The remnants would only disperse with the disappearance of the Kitsun from the Untamed Jungle and the Savannah region, wiping out their existence from the planet completely.

The Lords sighed in relief and accepted Michael's condition. Even without him saying anything, the three Lords wouldn't have allowed the Kitsun to stay alive. That race was simply too evil to be offered a second chance at survival. Every single one of them had to die and the problem had to be plucked straight from the root.

Michael was glad that the three Lords thought like him when it came to the Kitsun. He wouldn't have to worry about that anymore.

All that was left for him to do was to remove the Kitsun from the Untamed Jungle and everything would be alright.

After some polite discussion with the three Lords and Zira, Michael received a call from his people back in the base.

- "Tiara and the EmeraldLeaf Adventurer team have returned. They brought the Greater Eagles and the Golden Stinger Wasp along. But... somehow they seem battered. My Lord... are you sure that it was a good idea to leave them alone?" -

It was Blaire Tracer who had called him. She knew almost everything that had happened in the last few days because she was the leader of the main scouting team. Blaire required as much information as possible to be prepared for the worst-case scenario – which included the possibility of the Kitsun Lord attacking his base against the odds.

Fortunately, that didn't happen. The Kitsun Lord acted just like Michael had predicted. He followed the Elemental Empress in his blind obsession and moved farther away from Michael's territory with every minute passing.

Now that the Kitsun Lord was dead there shouldn't be many issues, other than the possibility of the Kitsun going crazy in the Untamed Jungle. But that was not something Michael was worried about.

"Tiara was a little injured before, but only Liopham from the EmeraldLeaf Adventurer team should have sustained some injuries. Well, and Lilica. But the others should be dead-tired rather than injured. Do you know what happened, Blaire?" Michael asked through the communication crystal.

He stepped away from the three Lords and Zira and focused on the communication crystal.

—"I am not so sure either, but it looks like they sustained some additional injuries. Their faces are filled with smiles though. I doubt that anything bad happened, my Lord!"

Michael couldn't help but frown at that. Tiara and the others looked bruised and battered, but they were happy? What exactly happened in the Untamed Jungle to make them happy?

Confused, Michael was just about to tell the Lords that he would return to his territory when Zira approached him.

"It looks like you have to get going. If your work is done here, how about I take you back to the Untamed Jungle? I have a fast companion, who can take you to the Untamed Jungle faster than you think!" She offered, just before she let out a low whistle.

Nothing happened in the first few seconds.

However, Michael heard something outside the tent less than ten seconds after Zira whistled. Zira walked outside and Michael followed suit, just to feel a presence that caused chills to erupt all over his body. A monster with an ebony coat and an otherworldly bright sheen appeared in front of Michael. It was a horse...or so Michael presumed. The monster looked like it was made out of obsidian forged in the fiery depths of the abyss.

It had a muscular frame and looked like shadows from the pits of the darkness clung to its very existence.

The horse's mane was a cascade of hellfire, a blazing torrent of crimson and orange flames that danced and flickered in an infernal life on their own.

Just looking at the horse made it difficult to breathe as the heavy malevolent aura of the monster swept through the surroundings.

"That...is your companion? Is that a Nightmare Horse?" Michael asked, not quite believing what he was seeing in front of him.

"Yup. The one and only Nightmare Horse raised by none other than me!" Zira said proudly.

Michael could only acknowledge her capabilities. Nightmare Horses were known for rejecting riders. Even those who could ignore their malevolent aura would either be burned to a crisp, or the Nightmare Horse would attack them with violent kicks and torrents of hellfire if they dared to approach it.

Yet, Zira patted the Nightmare Horse without a worry in her heart, almost as if it was a tamed pet.

'You can definitely be proud of yourself.' Michael thought to himself, but said something else, "You want to take me back...on this? Are you sure that it will allow me on its back?"

Michael didn't really want to be burned to death by a Nightmare Horse shortly after he survived fighting against the Kitsun Lord. However, Zira didn't seem to be too worried about Michael's doubts.

"The Nightmare Horse likes the Elemental Empress, and the Elemental Empress told her that you are a good guy. The Empress told my little girl a lot about you, so my girl made the offer. I wouldn't have offered to take you back if my girl hadn't given permission first," Zira said in a tone that suggested she was dead-serious.

"Okay..." Michael could only respond, "Let's go then."

There was no need to waste anymore time in the Savannah region. The Kitsun Lord was dead, Michael obtained hundreds of Awakened corpses, tens of thousands of Kitsun corpses, and he was given a pretty expensive gift for killing the Kitsun Lord.

Now it was time to return to the Untamed Jungle; home where a few troublesome days awaited him.

After all, he had yet to tell his subjects about the death of the 1,500 Combatants, and how all of it happened.

'That will be troublesome... I have a really bad feeling...' Michael thought as he swung his leg on the Nightmare Horse's back and jumped up, sitting right behind Zira.

Riding the Nightmare Horse seemed a lot less dangerous at the thought of going back home, where he would have to stand his ground against his own subjects.

'That will be fun...or a disaster.'

Chapter 399 Cores

The ride on the Nightmare Horse was...not as bad as Michael expected it to be. The Nightmare Horse was fast, but it ran through the Savannah region with a natural rhythm and gracefulness, which made it much easier for Michael to stay on its back.

Of course, the Greater Eagles were faster since they could fly in a straight line to the destination and didn't have to adjust their speed to the terrain. Nonetheless, Nightmare Horses could turn into great mounts for his Cavalry.

'If my territory was in the Savannah and not in the Untamed Jungle I would most-definitely get one of those!'

Riding back to the Untamed Jungle on the Nightmare Horse's back didn't take long. Michael would have to spend much longer traveling through the Untamed Jungle until he finally got back to his territory by ordinary means. But that was not much of an issue either.

He swung his left leg across the Nightmare Horse's back and jumped down to the ground.

"Thanks for the ride back. If you ever want to come over to my territory, just send me a message and it will be fine," Michael said to Zira.

At first, he didn't really mean what he said and thought of his words as pleasantries, but then he recalled her interesting combat style. If Zira were to come over to his territory she would be able to teach Michael's people quite a lot. Even Michael could learn a lot from Zira.

"I'll think about it. Thanks for the invitation. It was nice meeting you," Zira responded, tugging at the Nightmare Horse's reins to steer her companion.

"By the way...I know that it's a taboo to ask this but..." Zira hesitated. She stared back at Michael, unsure whether she should ask what had been on her mind for quite a while. However, upon seeing the vibrant glimmer in Michael's eyes Zira couldn't hold back, "How did you obtain so many powerful Soultraits? I really didn't want to count them, but I noticed that your last attack against the Kitsun Lord used at least 5...if not 6 Soultraits...and they were all powerful. The weakest Soultraits must have been a 4-Star Soultrait..."

Michael returned Zira's gaze and stared into her eyes without a change in his expression. He tried to recall his last attack against the Kitsun Lord and nodded slowly. He used Glacicle, Reinforced Sword Qi, Enhancement, Extraction, Eagle Eyes and Spirit Gaze in his final attack. Glacicle was almost a 5-Star Soultrait, but that didn't change the fact that Zira's analysis was correct.

He had used six powerful Soultraits against the Kitsun Lord.

In fact, considering his fusion with the Elemental Empress, Michael had exposed a total of seven Soultraits.

"I obtained some of them in a Lord Rift. But I wouldn't suggest you to enter a Lord Rift. I am not sure if I would enter the Lord Rift again if I had the chance to go back in time and change my decision..." Michael responded, his expression turning sour.

He sighed heavily and continued, "Either way, everyone has their secrets, right? Just know that I won't tell anyone about my secrets to anyone if they're not my subordinates and in a highly secure Soul Pact."

Michael felt that he had revealed too much already. Thus, he waved at Zira before he disappeared inside the Untamed Jungle, leaving the Valyr alone at the border.

The Elemental Empress was still clinging onto his shoulder, but she hadn't said anything until now. Only now that Michael and the Empress were alone did she finally regain her talkative spirit.

"Are we going home now? Will we finally be away from the Kitsun? Will I get my very own cave? Do you want to establish Links of Loyalty with every Elemental I create, or will it be fine if I control them? How about you make the Links with stronger Elementals and we leave the Lesser Elementals up to them?" The Elemental Empress bombarded Michael with questions; questions that Michael hadn't thought about until now.

With the Empress' questions ringing in his ears, Michael traveled through the Untamed Jungle. They didn't encounter any Kitsun Summons or Awakened on their way back, but they didn't actively search for them either. The Kitsun Hunt could start a little later.

Michael spent a few hours traveling back to his territory. On his way back, he focused on his chat with the Empress. That way, he learned a lot about his second tamed monster, such as the way she hoped to live.

The Empress hoped to obtain her own cave to create a society for Elementals underground. As she was the Elemental Empress, her core would create a surplus of elements. These elements had to be released in the outside atmosphere, or compressed to form Elementals Cores. Thus, the existence of the Elemental Empress alone was already enough to change the surrounding environment.

Michael had to make many mental notes about the intel provided by the Empress. However, he was not dissatisfied. On the contrary, Michael was quite happy about the numerous notes he had to make in his mind. Each mental note would help to improve the economy and develop his territory even faster.

He was not sure how much time passed while traveling, but it was already late evening when he returned to his small settlement. Initially, he wanted to gather his people and tell them about the incidents that had occurred in the Elementals Cave the moment he returned. But it was late, Michael was still tired, and the headache from the last battle hadn't subsided yet.

He wanted to go to sleep and tell everyone about the incident first thing in the morning.

However, before he could fall asleep and rest a little bit longer, Michael had to check on Tiara, the EmeraldLeaf Adventurer team, and the Greater Eagles.

Thus after entering his territory, he first moved to the Greater Eagles' nest. Icarus and his lovely mate had already fallen asleep. Their wounds had been tended to by the Priest and all they needed was rest and highly nutritious food. They wouldn't have any long-lasting injuries which was a relief.

Michael went to Tiara and the others next. He saw the Golden Stinger Wasp on his way and thanked it for its hard work by channeling bits of his purified origin energy into its monster core. Stinger hummed loudly, pleased to hear the praise, and disappeared in the next moment.

Then Michael entered the wooden manor where Tiara and the Forest Elven Adventurers were resting. They were still awake and impatiently tapping the wooden plank floor with their feet. The six Awakened had been waiting for his return.

Upon seeing Michael, their expressions lit up, and they rushed over to greet him.

"Michael, you're back!"

"It was about time that you returned. We've been waiting for ages!"

"I'm so tired. Let's get this done and jump straight into bed."

The cacophony of voices reaching Michael's ears caused him to frown deeply.

"If you guys are so tired, why didn't you go to sleep already?" He asked, which earned him an earful from the Forest Elves.

"Of course, we couldn't leave Tiara and Lilica. They would take away our joy and keep it for themselves!" Mika complained, pointing at the two women with trembling fingers.

Mika was still exhausted from using an heirloom arrow with several uses of Energy Imprint from Opars. His energy veins and muscles were sore and had sustained minor injuries. Yet, he didn't dare close his eyes and fall asleep. There was something he and the others had to do first.

"Okay?"

"Here. Take a look at those!" Tiara exclaimed, pushing Mika to the side to arrive right in front of Michael.

She held two large orbs in her hand and smiled brightly. Lilica arrived next to Tiara with two more orbs that looked the same as Tiara's. Opars and Pheli followed suit holding the exact same objects.

"Those are...Summoning Cores. Eight of them at that..." Michael blurted out seeing the eight Summoning Cores resting in the arms of the Forest Elves and Tiara, "By any chance...did you ask for Stinger because you wanted to invade the Kitsun Lord's main settlement?"

The only way to procure eight Summoning Cores was through Summoning Gates. However, there weren't any active Summoning Gates nearby – other than the Summoning Gate of the Kitsun Lord.

"Bingo!" Mika exclaimed while Tiara nodded her head vigorously, feeling proud of herself.

"We noticed that the Kitsun went crazy and thought that the Kitsun Lord died. Sun Demos confirmed our guess – though it was quite difficult to communicate with him. Once we made Sun Demos communicate with the Elemental Empress to bring Stinger over to the Untamed Jungle, we were refreshed enough to kill the remaining Awakened in the main settlement, to loot the wooden manor and empty the Summoning Gate," She revealed, only for Lilica to add,

"We took all Summoning Cores, stored all valuable goods, and brought the Awakened corpses back for you to extract as well!"

"So...instead of returning to the base and resting as ordered, you guys decided to invade the main settlement and fight in your current state, injured and exhausted... I am not sure if I should praise you guys for that, especially since the three neighboring Lords promised me that they wouldn't enter the Untamed Jungle," Michael said, the frown on his face deepening.

They had no reason to rush, yet the bunch of Forest Elves and Tiara ignored their wounds and exhaustion to invade their enemy's territory and steal the valuables that they would obtain one way or another.

'You guys could have died,' Michael wanted to say, but he couldn't get himself to speak the words aloud. Tiara and Lilica stared at him with puppy eyes that demanded treats and caresses, while the others looked at him with the hope to receive praise.

"But someone else could have stolen the valuables and Summoning Cores if not for you taking them first. So, you guys did the right thing. I'm proud of all of you!"

'Just don't jump into any more danger when you're already dead-tired...'

Chapter 400 Blame

Michael was exhausted as well, but he decided to purify the Summoning Cores and install them in his Summoning Gate before going to sleep.

Eight additional purified Summoning Cores meant that he would receive eight more daily summons – each with the prospects to be a 2-Star Summon. That meant he could summon 11 2-Star Summons every day if he was extremely lucky. That was amazing!

The gains Michael made from fighting the Kitsun Lord were tremendous. He could make up for the losses of 1,500 combatants quickly. That was, of course, only in numbers. It didn't make up for the fact that three-fourth of his army died in the Elementals Cave.

'I really hope that everything will be alright.' Michael thought as he finished installing the Summoning Cores. The hatch of the Summoning Gate closed automatically, and Michael went to his room in the wooden manor.

He actually wanted to focus on digesting the energy influx and energy shares to refine his War Rune quickly, but he knew that tomorrow would be a tiresome day.

Michael went into the bedroom and fell asleep at once. He fought for two days straight and didn't sleep at all. It was about time to make up for the lack of sleep.

Several hours passed in the blink of an eye, and the rays of the morning sun shone onto Michael's face, waking him from the slumber the next day.

He opened his eyes slowly and got up from the bed. Afterward, he washed himself well to get rid of all the dirt, grime and blood that had been stuck to him for the last few days and put on a neat, clean set of clothes after drying. Michael sighed heavily several times in the process of washing up, putting on clothes, and leaving the wooden manor.

His subjects had already heard about his return and that he would be holding a speech early in the morning. Therefore, it was no surprise to find hundreds of Summons gathered in the center of the settlement. Most Summons gathered on the ground, but there were also hundreds of people gathered on the canopy bridge above the ground. Some Forest Elven Summons even decided to sit down on the tree branches near the settlement's center.

Last but not least, Michael found a bunch of Forest Elves sitting on the rooftops of some buildings to make sure that they could see Michael as he held his speech.

Michael stepped in front of the wooden manor's entrance and was just about to start his speech when he heard a voice amid the crowd of people.

"Where are our friends? I haven't seen David and the others even after the Commander, and My Lord have returned. Did something happen? That cannot be. You would never allow anything to happen to them...right, my lord?!"

The voice was not loud, but those words pierced straight through Michael's heart. For a moment he felt helpless, unsure what to say. Tiara and the EmeraldLeaf Adventurer team arrived next to Michael a few seconds after the voice died down. Other voices of concern followed up soon, but Michael couldn't hear them. All he could hear and feel was the reassuring words of Tiara and Lilica.

They patted his shoulder to encourage him to stay calm and hold his ground in front of his subjects as they said, "It will be fine. We're here."

"Don't worry. You did everything you could. Nobody could have saved them. It was unfortunate, but you warned them, and they didn't listen. They forced you to take them with you. It was not the other way around!" Lilica said, tightly gripping his shoulder. Her emerald eyes glimmered brightly as she stared deep into Michael's eyes.

"I know," was all Michael could say to Lilica. He then turned back to the crowd of people in front of him, ready to face his own people, face his own fight...and accept that everyone died in the Elementals Cave because of...because of what? His actions? His subjects' desire to fight? Or because of their enemy's sly tactics?

Clearing his throat, he looked up at the hopeful faces as all the voices of concern died down. Michael's lips parted and he began his speech.

"First of all, I would like to apologize to everyone. I didn't expect such a situation to happen. However, it happened because we desired to free the Elementals and because we wanted to get rid of our enemy's biggest source of income. We wanted to weaken him...and ran straight into a trap," Michael took a deep breath, his voice shaking a bit as he said that. Taking a moment to calm himself down, he gathered his thoughts and began anew.

"It all started with the scouts' reporting potential threats and enemies moving slowly into our direction. We found Elementals, controlled by Summons by a race called Kitsun. The Kitsun race is evil...."

Michael didn't know how long he spoke, but the entire settlement was eerily silent the whole time. Not even the younger Summons said anything. They didn't even move. Everyone listened intently to Michael's summary of the battle. He didn't mention that the army pleaded to him to take him with them inside the Elementals Cave because that would sound like a petty excuse.

However, there was no excuse for the death of the 1,500 Summons. Michael didn't want to mock their deaths after they sacrificed themselves by pushing his responsibility onto them. That didn't feel right. That was not how a leader was supposed to be.

Michael even spoke about the events that happened right after the Elementals Cave incident. He didn't go into detail when speaking about the invasion of the main settlement, the destruction of the Beast Ranches, or the actions of the Blood Oath Demon Monkey troupe. Nonetheless, he said more than enough to pinpoint that he, and his people never stopped attacking the Kitsun Lord until he was dead. They had been in danger for two days and only came back once it was safe to say that the Kitsun Lord and his subjects wouldn't be able to stir trouble – not anymore.

But even after telling them the danger he and the others were put in, Michael noticed that the expressions of the people around him grew sour. Their Links of Loyalty took a hit as well. The Links of Loyalty of more than 800 subjects grew fainter, even if it was not by much. It was a clear indicator that their trust in Michael had decreased a little.

"You told us that you would give your utmost to protect everyone. But...now you're unscathed and our friends, and potential future family is dead. Do you have nothing to say about that...My Lord?..." One of the subjects asked, forcing himself to add the salutation 'My Lord' at the end of his question.

"WE trusted you just like your Warriors, but now they're dead. What does that mean, my Lord?"

"How can you expect us to fight for you if you cannot even protect those fighting by your side? They worked so hard to grow stronger, only to die for you? Don't make me laugh...my lord..."

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More and more subjects were pulled along after the first people began to complain to Michael. Most Summons were just sad to hear what happened to their friends and colleagues. They didn't hate Michael, or thought about holding him accountable for what happened. However, they needed someone to blame for their friends' deaths. Michael was their Lord, and he was responsible for taking the army with him inside the Elementals Cave. He was the only one they could curse in their hearts. After all, they had never seen a Kitsun, let alone the Kitsun Lord.

Every time his subjects said "My Lord", Michael felt like someone pushed a dagger deep inside his heart. It was hard to bear, but Michael did it. He silently endured and listened to their complaints and curses without trying to defend himself.

"Ya...is everyone here stupid, or mentally challenged? Is it really that difficult for them to use their brain to think for once?" Tiara asked Lilica in a loud tone. Her vocal cords were enhanced with origin energy to make sure that her voice would overshadow the voice of everyone else.

"I don't really understand them either. Since when is the Origin Expanse a peaceful place? Michael achieved too many impossible feats. Maybe these idiots expect him to be a War God, capable of killing everyone with a snap. Of course, it's sad that so many loyal warriors died, but everyone willing to join the territory's military force knows what awaits them. They're not foolish enough to become Warriors and to expect to never face any danger," Lilica responded even louder than Tiara, the anger in her voice apparent.

"I couldn't agree more. Everyone was willing to follow Michael into the Elementals Cave knowing that they might die. The incident was unexpected and quite misfortunate, but situations like those will always happen during War. The sole reason why Michael focuses on nurturing the military force with most of the territory's funds is to strengthen his Warriors to prevent situations like those from happening. It happened once, and it won't repeat itself again. In fact, I'm sure that Michael hates himself more than anyone because he couldn't do anything about the disaster in the Elementals Cave," Mika said, happy that he could finally slap the idiotic subjects with words.

Tiara took a step forward to make sure that everyone's attention was on her.

"He hates himself for having been too weak. For being unable to protect those who trusted him. Yet, after fighting for two days straight to make sure that his territory would be safe and sound, the same people he wanted to protect with his life on the line are blaming him. To think that such disgraceful bastards exist!" Tiara cursed, her voice growing louder and louder.

However, she was not done yet. In fact, Tiara was just getting started. How dare they attack Michael?!

"This is the Origin Expanse! A place full of war and dangers. It's not a playground where we play war. This is real. We put our lives on the line to protect the civilians and to give them a better life. Don't you dare to blame my Master for something that wasn't his fault! Fuck you all!!!"