

Supreme Lord 71

Chapter 71 Archer Ace

It hadn't been long since Michael obtained the Hardwood Bow.

Only a few days passed, and he wasn't able to test his newest Artifact as much as he wished to. Fortunately, now he finally received the opportunity to test out the gains he made in the last few days.

His perception was heightened through several Artifacts, including the Return Arrow, the Hardwood Bow, and Tigerfang.

It was no problem for Michael to scan his surroundings precisely, and it became even easier upon activating the Eagle Eyes.

"The slit between the golden sign and the principal's photo is the next target," Michael said calmly as he turned his body.

He retrieved the next arrow from his War Rune and nocked it on the bowstring. He channeled some energy in the Hardwood bow to increase the strength he had to use to pull the bowstring back and kept his Eagle Eyes activated.

It was not necessary to keep using his Soultrait but it was almost like a default setting, a subconscious act engraved in his mind to use the Eagle Eyes when he held a bow in his hands. He felt uncomfortable not using the Eagle Eyes Soultrait when he acted as an archer.

Michael pulled the bowstring back and adjusted the angle before he released the arrow two seconds later.

With a dull thud, the arrow pierced the five-centimeter-big gap separating the sign that quoted the school's motto, and the frame of the principal's huge photo on the other side of the room.

The shooting range was merely 50 meters, but the targeted area was very small.

Michael hit the target with great precision, yet he was not satisfied. He had aimed a few millimeters northwest but missed his target by a few inches.

'I need to be a little bit more careful when I channel energy inside the Hardwood bow. I should have used a tad bit more energy.'

Michael's experiments with the Hardwood bow had been mostly about the bow's strongest force. He had channeled a lot of energy inside it to test the Hardwood bow's limit, but that was it.

"What are you guys waiting for? Is it too scary? To think that my high and mighty classmates are scared chickens. How funny!" Michael said in a loud and provoking voice.

He chuckled while waiting for the response of the arrogant fools. Some of his former classmates stepped forward, just like Michael had expected. They shot at the target but failed miserably.

Their arrows hit the golden sign or the wooden frame, but they didn't hit the designated target. Even if their aim was only a little off, they had failed in their task. It was all because they had been influenced by Michael's provocation.

Enraged, they released their arrow a fraction of a second too soon.

It was just a tiny mistake, but that was everything it took for them to fail.

"Trash!" Niklas growled before he pushed his useless subordinates to the side.

He shot the target and hit it easily after taking his time to aim at the target for several seconds.

Inspired by Niklas' successful shot, the others followed suit and took some time to adjust their aim. However, soon enough, it was clear enough that the target was too difficult to hit.

Other than Kaleb, Niklas, and Michael, only two more people were able to hit the designated target.

Both were already Low Tier-0 Lords, leaving Kaleb the only unawakened in the competition.

On the other hand, Michael's War Rune had the highest refinement degree. However, that was weird and difficult for his classmates to digest.

He hadn't manifested his War Rune at the final exam. Only a week passed since then, yet Michael's War Rune was already more refined than Niklas' War Rune.

Furthermore, his archery skill had improved by leaps and bounds. Was that the extent of growth one received upon manifesting a War Rune? That shouldn't be the case.

Did that mean Michael was special? This loser?

That couldn't be!

Niklas couldn't believe it. He was not the only one who was shocked, but he was hit the hardest.

The ordinary loser, who was supposed to become a slave of society, had grown ridiculously strong within a single week.

Not only that, but he obtained an Epic Weapon Artifact as well!! How did Michael deserve that??

Under the influence of his raging emotions, Niklas pointed across the room, locking eyes with the next target.

"The purple grapes are the next target," He announced before he pulled back the bowstring of his bow. An arrow was already nocked on the bowstring.

Niklas aimed for more than ten seconds before he release the arrow that shot across the auditorium. The arrow flew past the buffet tables and tore through the chocolate fountain – which obstructed the path to the grapes – before it impacted.

However, instead of smiling pridefully, Niklas' expression darkened. His arrow pierced a green grape instead of a purple one.

"Does that mean he is disqualified?" Michael asked aloud the next moment. Through his Eagle Eyes he could clearly see the arrow and the green grape that had been pierced.

The question earned him a glare from Niklas, while Kaleb nodded his head to their right, "Since he said that the purple grapes are the target, he should be disqualified."

"What is everyone else thinking about this?" Kaleb added generously asking the others for their opinion.

A sliver of hope surfaced in Niklas' heart, only to be crushed a moment later when Jasmine Blade and the other girls supported Kaleb.

"I think Kaleb is right. Niklas should be disqualified. He didn't hit his target, after all!"

Michael smiled, ignoring Kaleb's comment. He stepped closer to Niklas because it was his turn now and stood in the same spot to shoot the target.

He pulled the bowstring back once an arrow had been nocked before he released the arrow two seconds later. His arrow shot through the chocolate fountain easily, and it pierced through two purple grapes at the same time.

"That was easier than expected," He muttered, just to step aside to give the others enough space to try it as well.

Niklas glared at Michael, who returned a bright smile.

"You should keep the money ready. I will share my bank account details with you when this is over," Michael added in a gloating voice before he began to laugh lightly.

He never expected that it would be that easy to earn several million dollars in less than half an hour!

"Who said that you won?" Kaleb asked coldly when he finished his turn. He had hit the purple grapes along with Michael and reached the next round.

So, he did not like that Michael was already declaring himself a winner.

"You're not bad. Everyone said that you're just a loser, but it looks like you didn't bet the Epic Artifact foolishly!" Kaleb praised Michael, who could only shrug his shoulders.

He had yet to forgive Kaleb for making him lose his appetite. Nonetheless, he couldn't help but feel that Kaleb's personality was not that bad.

'He left a bad first impression on me but it's not as if Alice was better. Maybe that's a family thing?'

"How about you announce the next target?" Kaleb asked, ignoring Niklas, who wanted to veto his disqualification.

He merely stared coldly at Niklas before Kelen pulled his former student back. It was not worth enraging the Zenovia family because of a little bet!

"Are you sure about that?" Michael asked, feeling slightly astonished.

Was Kaleb just arrogant or was there a reason behind his offer?

But Kaleb just smiled at Michael before he gestured to him, "Of course, I'm sure. Do as you please!"

"Don't cry later then," Michael mumbled.

He recalled something about the stage in the auditorium as he thought about his next target. It was often used for skits and theater shows of the school's theatre club, and Michael had to help them out once or twice in the past.

"I will pierce the clock behind the curtain. It's backstage." Michael announced his final target while walking further away from the auditorium's stage and stopping a good distance away from the stage, "...from here."

After he announced his target, Michael didn't stay idle.

He activated his Eagle Eyes' full power and channeled a considerable amount of energy into the 3-Star Hardwood bow to increase its efficiency. He took a deep breath and used the full extent of his own expertise and Fenrir's Archery memories that were now fully integrated into his mind.

Michael adjusted his aim for a few seconds before he released the arrow at last.

The arrow cut through the air much faster than his earlier arrows. It shot through a metal ring that attached the curtain to the crossbar on the ceiling and impacted with a loud thud.

Everyone held their breath when they saw that Michael's arrow disappeared backstage. Their heartstrings were pulled the moment the sound of something breaking rang through the eerily silent auditorium.

It was not even possible for most people to see the metal ring from Michael's position, yet he shot through it and hit something. That alone was already enough to make them realize that Michael was slowly becoming an expert. He was clearly a veteran even without decades of practice!

When the first graduate near the stage regained his senses, he rushed backstage.

A moment later, his shocked exclamation resounded through the entire auditorium.

"Oh my god, he hit the clock!!"

Chapter 72 Cheater

The sound of glass shards falling to the ground rang through the auditorium

Some swallowed their saliva with an audible gulp. Then there was nothing except an awkward silence.

Nobody dared to make a sound as their gaze was focused on the theater's stage and the tiny ring.

Did Michael's arrow actually pass through the metal ring and cut through the curtain before hitting the clock, or were they hallucinating?

It had to be a dream!

Everyone was shocked to the core. They had always assumed Michael to be a good for nothing...or so they thought. Everything they knew about Michael seemed like a big lie, and it made them feel miserable.

How was it possible that this loser was more talented than them?! Wasn't he just a loser? How could that be?

Michael savored the change in the distorted expressions of his former classmates, and everyone else present. It was a great feeling to be towering above everyone else, to be the reason everybody's face was drained of all the earlier joy and color. Finally, he didn't have to hold back anymore. There was nothing they could do to him now that they had signed a legally binding contract.

Threaten him with their family's power? They could try!

Michael was not afraid of their family's power or influence, not anymore.

Thus, he calmly pointed at the stage while his gaze was fixated on Kaleb.

"It's your turn," He said calmly.

Kaleb stared blankly at Michael. He was not confident in hitting that shot.

Their distance to the theater stage was roughly 100 meters, and the gap in the metal ring was tiny, almost negligible from this distance.

Kaleb couldn't even see the gap in the metal ring clearly, forget about the clock backstage.

However, Kaleb couldn't give up now. It was already too late, and his pride was on the line. If he was to lose against an ordinary citizen in an archer competition his image would be tarnished. Kaleb couldn't accept that!

He momentarily forgot about the bet they made as he took a deep breath. His pride was far more important than an insignificant bet!

Kaleb retrieved an arrow calmly. He nocked it on the bowstring, which he pulled back slowly.

Kaleb held his breath once the bowstring reached the corner of his mouth. He aimed at the metal ring for more than ten seconds before his arm became still. He was poised and his body tense while his entire focus was locked on the target.

Then he released the arrow.

The arrow flew through the air in a beautiful arc. It reached the theater stage in the next second and was steadily moving toward the metal ring.

At that moment, the corner of Kaleb's lips turned upward, and his fans began to cheer. Even Jasmine Blade clenched her fists in joy.

Kaleb's arrow was bound to pierce through the tiny gap in the metal ring!

However, just as everyone thought Kaleb would hit the designated target, his expression changed.

He noticed that the arrow slowed down earlier than he anticipated. It fell behind in speed a fraction of a second earlier than it should have been, but Kaleb noticed that. He had predicted the trajectory of the arrow, but it didn't take the perfect course.

Michael noticed that as well.

"It's your bow," He said quietly.

The next moment, the arrow reached the curtain on the stage. A loud jingling noise echoed through the surroundings.

The arrow hit the metal ring and fell down with a thud. The cheering of Jasmine and the other girls stopped abruptly, and a stony silence enveloped them again.

Kaleb lost the competition.

His arrow missed the metal ring by a hair's breadth, but he lost.

The cheers died down and Kaleb's expression worsened.

Meanwhile, Michael was stunned though he felt elated by his own performance.

The only reason Kaleb lost was the strength of his bow. Kaleb had used the maximum range of his bow. Only a bow with a stronger pulling force such as his Hardwood Bow could fly that far without losing much traction.

However, the bow Kaleb had used was already his limit. He was only 17 years old and he hadn't manifested the War Rune yet. Without the War Rune, he couldn't refine his body. Kaleb was clearly at his limit.

Meanwhile, Michael had only been confident to win against the golden spoons like Kaleb and others, who had undergone a completely different training regime than him from a young age, because he had the Eagle Eyes, the 3-Star Hardwood Bow Artifact, and Fenrir's memories as an archer.

Of course, it was also necessary to be able to calmly pull the Hardwood Bow's bowstring, which was something he could do easily through the strength he received from his War Rune's high refinement degree.

The advantages at his disposal determined his victory in the archer competition, but that didn't matter.

A victory was a victory!

Kaleb had challenged Awakened because he was too arrogant. He had been certain that he would win against the people in the afterparty, which was why he challenged them. Thus, Kaleb had to live with the consequences of his actions. That was what Michael thought.

A seed of joy blossomed in Michael's heart, and he chose to forgive Kaleb for making him lose his appetite. Being too petty now that he won the archer competition, and the bet didn't suit him.

'I am forgiving Kaleb for committing such a heinous sin. See how generous I am!' Michael patted himself mentally while looking at Kaleb with a faint smile.

But Kaleb could only frown. He looked at Michael, whose Artifacts had already returned to his War Rune, and opened his mouth.

"You have a Soultrait that enhances your Eyesight, don't you?" He asked coldly, all of a sudden.

Michael raised an eyebrow at the tone of Kaleb's voice. He didn't think it was necessary to give an answer. This was not an interrogation.

"Cheater..."

Michael stared at Kaleb in disbelief. Was Kaleb a whiny person?

"You're a cheater!" He shouted now, but it sounded more like a dog barking pitifully after a juicy piece of bone was snatched from it.

It was obvious that Kaleb didn't want to acknowledge that he lost the competition. He grit his teeth and clenched his fists furiously.

Meanwhile, Michael could only stare back at Kaleb, unsure what to say.

'Is he an idiot?'

"You do realize that you challenged several Lords just now, right? The chance to encounter someone with a better bow, or a suitable Soultrait was not that small," Michael tried to put sense in the prideful prick before he added a little bit more seriously, "But you do realize that you signed a contract where all of that is clearly stated, right?"

The content of the contract, which Michael had drafted, clearly stated that they were going to hold an archery competition between ordinary people and Awakened Lords and Adventurers.

If Kaleb would have read the contract instead of signing it blindly, he might have been a little bit more careful.

"You bastard... Do you even know who I am?!" Kaleb roared at last.

His behavior stunned Michael, along with the other participants of the competition and everyone else present.

Jasmine wished she could bury herself underground at this moment. Since when did Kaleb turn into such an embarrassing, jealous idiot?

If he had simply accepted his loss graciously, nobody would have said something. In fact, he would have been praised for his great talent. After all, he had bagged second place in a competition against Lords.

It was obvious that Michael had a Soultrait that enhanced his archery skill, but what did that matter?

Nobody wanted to acknowledge it, but Michael's victory was justified. There had been a reason he confidently bet an Epic Artifact on his victory.

That loser was not the same loner as he had been before!

Michael frowned deeply when Kaleb played the 'family' trump card. He knew who the Zenovia family was. Of course, he knew!

Thus, a faint smile blossomed on his face as he looked provokingly at Kaleb.

"You're an idiot. So what?"

Chapter 73 Sister

"You're an idiot. So what?"

Michael's words thundered in Kaleb's ears. His mouth opened slightly but no words came out.

"Do you think your family would like that you're throwing a tantrum and ruin their image, just because you lost a small, private competition? I doubt that they would love to see you gambling either," Michael added, his voice growing colder with each spoken word.

"Your actions are childish and so is your attitude. I cannot believe that you're already 17 years old. You act more immature than some 5-year-old children!"

Michael was a little bit disappointed. Except for Kaleb's bad first impression, Michael thought that the young man from the Zenovia family might have a better personality and some brains. Unfortunately, that didn't seem to be the case.

Kaleb, who was already boiling in anger, couldn't control his emotions anymore. He took a stride closer to Michael with blazing flames of hatred flickering in his eyes.

It looked like Kaleb was about to pounce on Michael.

'He knows that I'm an Awakened Lord...did he forget that just now?'

At that moment – just before Kaleb could do something he would regret later – the clicking sound of heels rang through everyone's ears from farther away. It sounded like someone was running inside from the other side of the room.

It looked like someone had arrived at the entrance of the auditorium when everyone was focused on the final round of the archer competition.

At first, everyone thought that the principal, or other teachers, who had left earlier to talk amongst each other, had returned upon hearing the commotion Kaleb made.

However, that was not the case at all.

It was a woman with a captivating appearance. She radiated a beauty that demanded attention.

However, that was not all.

With her long black hair, piercing ocean-blue eyes, sharp and confident gaze, and a hint of a mischievous smile, the beautiful woman exuded an irresistible combination of fierceness and allure. Her movements were sharp, yet elegant. She looked confident and unapproachable as she stepped closer to the crowd with her gaze fixated on one point.

The woman wore casual clothes, but that didn't hide her beauty in the slightest.

A single glance was enough to stir envy in the hearts of the women and cause the men's hearts to skip a beat.

But Michael was just confused as he looked at the beauty.

'What is she doing here?'

It was Alice Zenovia, living up to the nickname he gave her; fierce beauty.

While the others stared at her in awe, Kaleb started to shiver.

There was not a single trace left of his domineering attitude from a few seconds ago.

"Sis, w-what are you doing here?" He stuttered, feeling stupefied.

Kaleb didn't expect to meet his sister today. Why was she in the Golden Sun province? Did their parents tell her to drag him home?

However, Alice ignored her brother. She walked past him and stopped only when she was in front of Michael.

"What's the use of telling me that you won't enter the Origin Expanse for a while when you're not online to answer my messages, either way?" She asked him, placing her hands on her hips.

Michael opened the messenger where he saw several messages from Alice. Only now did he recall that he didn't look at the messenger after he told her that he would be online for a while.

In fact, Michael had only said that to appease her because he felt guilty for being angry at Alice earlier for beating around the bush when she told him about the Sapphirelake Military Academy's benefits.

He had felt guilt-ridden, which disappeared only after he told her that he wouldn't return to the Origin Expanse for a while.

"Oops," Michael mumbled while scratching the back of his head sheepishly.

What was the use of telling her that he wouldn't enter the Origin Expanse if he wasn't online, in the first place?

"OOPS?! You bastard!" Alice's anger flared up seeing how nonchalant he acted.

She had only a little freetime now that the aptitude assessment of the Sapphirelake Military Academy was about to start, but she spent most of it providing Michael with enough detailed information and helping him despite her busy schedule. All of this was just to make sure that he wouldn't miss the aptitude assessment.

And so far, he had not given her a certain answer. Would he appear for the assessment test, or would he ditch her?

Michael couldn't suppress a smile when he thought about his attitude toward Alice.

"Stop smiling like that, yo—..." Alice shouted before Michael interrupted her, "I'll come on the 20th, don't worry."

Alice shut her mouth and tilted her head as if she was trying to process his words.

A moment later, an "Oh..." escaped her lips.

Her anger dissipated in the next instance and a smile appeared on her face.

"That's great! It is good that you finally listened to my advice. Seems like my hard work finally paid off!" She mused to herself while patting his shoulder.

"By the way, I saw your last shot. Your archery skills are pretty good. Looks like your Soultrait is quite compatible with archery."

Michael was still unsure why Alice Zenovia paid so much attention to him, and why she was so adamant about him joining the Saphirelake Military Camp, but that was something he could find out when the time was ripe. He was sure that he wouldn't receive a satisfying answer if he were to ask right now.

However, Michael was fine with that. He didn't get any bad vibes from her. That was the most important.

'It's not like she gains anything if I join the Saphirelake Military Academy,' He told himself, '...I guess?'

"If you saw the last shot, you must have seen what happened after that as well, right?" Michael asked suddenly, "Is that stingy brat really your brother? You guys are so different..."

Michael didn't intend to praise Alice and mock her brother in the same line, but she seemed to take his words as a compliment. She pulled her hair back and smiled smugly.

"That idiot is my brother, unfortunately," She acknowledged.

A glint flashed in Michael's eyes and the corner of his lip curled up a bit.

"In that case, you might solve this issue," He said, explaining the situation of the archer competition, the bet and the contract they'd signed.

Michael displayed the contract for her to read and waited patiently for her verdict.

He read Alice's face, and how her expression contorted as she glanced through the clauses.

That was when he knew.

He had successfully changed the topic from the Saphirelake Military Academy to something far more important; Kaleb and the debt he owed him!

Since Alice was already here, he might as well use her to get his money's worth!

Kaleb stared at Michael in utter confusion. His head flicked to his sister and his expression contorted.

'What the hell is going on, right now? Are they acquaintances? How do they know each other? Didn't everyone say that Michael hailed from an ordinary background?'

One confusing question after another formed in Kaleb's mind, but there was no answer.

His confusion grew, and so did his worry.

After all, he didn't want to face his sister's fury.

Kaleb's lips parted, and he was about to say something when his sister's head turned in his direction.

It was as if time slowed down all of a sudden.

Kaleb realized at this moment...he had fucked up!

Chapter 74 Real Treasure

In the next ten minutes, everyone began to pity Kaleb.

Alice lived up to her nickname of fierce beauty as she thrashed her brother in front of everyone.

Jasmine had long since stepped back, her cheeks red and her eyes teary.

She had wanted to show off her boyfriend in front of everyone but was humiliated by his childish behavior in the end. Kaleb had been on his best behavior at first, but he lost his temper when Michael won the competition.

However, that was not even the worst. The way Alice thrashed her brother without caring about their surroundings made Jasmine feel wary about the siblings and felt suddenly uncertain about her future as the daughter-in-law of the family.

Kaleb looked like a pitiful, whiny puppy that had been kicked in the gut.

It reached a point where even Michael couldn't take it anymore. He stepped forward and cleared his throat.

"How about we stop right here? I can just say that he never participated in the bet," Michael said quietly.

Even if it hurt his heart a little to lose that much money, Kaleb was just too whiny. It was not as if Michael would lose the money the others bet, either. Only Kaleb wouldn't have to pay him anymore.

However, Alice could only sigh deeply when she heard what Michael said and turned to her brother with a frown, "Look, even Michael pities you..."

Alice Zenovia lost the strength to keep shouting at her brother and could only shake her head.

To her, it felt like Kaleb had lost a few brain cells. Usually, he was intelligent and composed. He knew what he was supposed to do, and what he should refrain from doing.

So why would he challenge Lords while he had yet to manifest his War Rune? That was plain stupid in her opinion.

In fact, that was not even the problem. The problem was that he threw a fit after losing against a Lord, and calling him a cheater for using his Soultrait, which was totally legitimate.

If that was everything, she would have forgiven him after scolding him publicly, but Kaleb even made a bet, signing a contract in the name of the Zenovia family.

That idiot didn't even hesitate to implicate the Zenovia family and ruin their image!

If their parents and elders were to find out about today's events, and everything Kaleb did in the last half an hour, they would severely punish him. Alice's small lecture in front of his girlfriend and a few dozen people would be nothing compared to the punishment they would give him.

Unfortunately, Kaleb had still not learned a lesson. He was glaring at Michael, knowing that he was pitied. Michael's pitiful gaze hurt him more than his sister's lecture.

In a fit, he retrieved a golden card from his pocket and threw it in front of Michael.

"Take the Golden Bartholomew Membership Card, and stop bothering me, ba—..." He bellowed, only to be slapped on the back of the head when he was about to insult Michael.

Michael pressed his lips together and picked up the golden membership card of Bartholomew. He handed it to Alice, who looked at the membership card in confusion.

"He shouldn't give me his membership card. I have my own," Michael explained calmly while retrieving his own membership card to show them.

Since Kaleb was from the Zenovia family, it was no surprise that he possessed the membership cards of most big companies. It was a mere coincidence that he withdrew the golden Bartholomew membership card.

Alice pulled her brother's hand back, but she couldn't hide her astonishment.

"You have the—..." She asked, only to stop midway. Alice squinted her beautiful eyes and her eyebrows furrowed as if she was seeing him in a new light.

"Did I underestimate him? The background check clearly stated that there is nothing special about his family..."

With that thought, Alice turned back to her brother who had thoroughly disappointed her today

"What exactly did you guys bet? I didn't see it clearly earlier," Alice asked coldly, but Kaleb couldn't get himself to answer.

'This is so awkward...can't we solve this issue somewhere else?' Michael wondered in his head.

However, he sensed that Alice wanted to teach her brother a lesson in front of everyone. Michael was fairly sure that Kaleb didn't think of the lecture as something that intended to help him. On the contrary, Alice's lecture was bound to backfire and have the opposite effect on Kaleb.

Unfortunately, Alice looked at him hopefully when Kaleb didn't answer.

He retrieved Tigerfang with a sigh and handed it over.

"Since he didn't specify the item, he was going to bet in the contract, he will have to hand over an item of equal value, or hard cash of the same value as the Artifact I bet."

Michael did not ask for a specific amount of money or Artifact, but that was mostly because he had no idea how expensive Tigerfang was. Even he was not sure how his brother was able to procure a Tierless Epic Artifact.

Alice didn't think too much about the thin longsword at first. However, when she used one of her Appraisal-type Artifacts, she could only curse her brother for such a costly mistake.

"An Epic Artifact. It is a Weapon Artifact, which increases its value, and it's Tierless... It doesn't have an enchantment, which means that it is a naturally formed Epic-grade Artifact. Its power and enhancement is as powerful as a 3-Star Tier-1 Weapon Artifact, maybe a little bit weaker," She mumbled quietly to herself as she analyzed the weapon.

"Despite its great enhancement, sharpness, and endurance, it can be wielded by a Tierless Lord. This fact alone increases its value manyfold. Mankind has yet to find a Tierless 6-Star Artifact, and even Tierless 5-Star Artifacts are as rare as phoenix feathers... You cannot purchase such an Artifact easily because nobody is willing to sell a life-saving tool to Rookie Lords that easily.

It's an invaluable treasure all big families and clans would purchase for a horrifying price. After all, everyone wants their offspring and disciples to start their journey in the Origin Expanse with the best preparations..."

When Alice finished her appraisal of the weapon, she stared at Michael without uttering a word for a while. Even the biggest families had a tough time finding such a treasure, yet Michael, an ordinary young man, was an owner of a Tierless Epic-grade Weapon Artifact??

How could that be possible?

"How did you obtain this Artifact?" Alice asked, clearly more interested in the answer than her brother's stupid bet.

Michael was also a little confused after listening to Alice's explanation. He knew that Tigerfang was rare and valuable, but it seemed as if Tigerfang was much more valuable than he thought, or Danny had made it look.

"My brother gifted it to me after my War Rune manifested," He answered after a few seconds.

"Your brother? If I remember correctly, he is just a Tier-2 Lor-...Nevermind that... Did he find this Artifact in some ruins, or did he purchase it from the black market?" Alice Zenovia asked quickly, trying to cover up the slip of tongue.

Michael heard her comment but was not surprised. He figured that she had already investigated his family background when she invited him to the Sapphirelake Military Academy. It made sense.

However, he couldn't help but frown at her question.

'How am I supposed to know where he got Tigerfang from?!'

Chapter 75 Condition

'Seriously, how did Danny get his hands on Tigerfang?!' Michael mused after Alice explained the true value of the Tierless Epic Artifact.

He thought about it for a while and gave it a shrug.

"Danny told me that he found Tigerfang on his way back home. That could mean he either found it on his way back from the Origin Expanse or when he was out shopping. I don't really know."

When he spoke about the Origin Expanse, Michael recalled that Danny was currently exploring the Primedival Pyramid. That made him think that Danny might have procured Tigerfang on his first expedition in the Primedival Pyramid's outer perimeters.

He had never asked Danny much about it since he did not know the true value of Tigerfang. However, that was just a guess. He could only tell Alice what he thought, which was nothing certain.

She understood that and nodded faintly.

"Do you want an Epic Artifact of the same value as Tigerfang, money, or resources?" Alice asked before she gave him a well-meant advice, "You cannot buy something like a Tierless Epic Artifact of the Weapon Type like Tigerfang with money usually. If I was in your position, I would either ask for rare resources of an Epic Artifact."

The fierce beauty glared coldly at Kaleb for being stupid enough to make a bet against Lords while being unawakened, but that was not Michael's fault.

The contract Michael had drafted wasn't anything special, but it was neat and did not leave any loophole for Kaleb to wriggle out of the contract without paying what Michael demanded. If Kaleb had spent a minute or two reading it, he could have avoided creating such unnecessary problems.

Kaleb couldn't look into his sister's eyes. He lowered his head subconsciously, and so did the other participants of the archery competition.

Thankfully, they had not bet much money, but they felt as if Kaleb's sister had slapped and lectured them to along with her brother for daring to offer such a ridiculous amount of money while Michael bet Tigerfang without hesitation. The participants imagined the fierce beauty staring at them with disgust in her eyes while slapping their faces.

Most felt humiliated, while only a few looked at the fierce beauty with a trace of anticipation in their eyes.

Michael could tell that these few didn't have good intentions, but he ignored them. He cleared his throat and smiled lightly.

"The others are going to pay me with money, so I wouldn't have asked you for money, either way. I'm actually reconsidering selling Tigerfang after my War Rune breaks through the 1st Tier. If you can help me out a little with that, we might be able to create a win-win situation," Michael offered after giving it some thought.

Alice had been very helpful over the past few days, and he didn't want to make things too difficult for her and strain their relationship because of Kaleb. However, that was not everything he had in mind.

Tigerfang's value was the highest for Rookie Lords. That meant, Michael could sell Tigerfang once he reached the 1st Tier in order to buy a Tier-1 Weapon Artifact with a similarly strong enhancement effect while the remaining money would be put to good use.

Alice noticed what he meant. She took a step closer to him and grasped his wrist.

"Let's talk somewhere else!" She said before walking off with Michael.

When Alice grasped his wrist, Michael felt tremendous power surging through her delicate fingers. It was the first time he noticed that Alice Zenovia was not only beautiful and fierce looking, but that she was also extremely powerful.

He couldn't do anything against her tremendous strength, and merely turned his head to shout at the others, "You guys have my contact details. I've already forwarded my bank account details in the group chat. Pay up quickly, or get sued, idi—...thanks!"

Since he didn't really care about his former classmates or anyone else from high school, Michael could act however he pleased and not be formal or polite anymore.

In fact, the only important connection he had made in high school was at the final exam; Alice Zenovia. She might be a bit fierce and annoying at times, but her connections and pieces of advice were very helpful.

'Even without Kaleb's bet, I should have made roughly...10 million from all bets...Nice!!'

Michael was a bit excited. He had never expected these privileged kids to walk right into his trap. Of course, the entire situation could have gone south, but that didn't happen. He had more than enough reason to believe that he could win, either way.

He knew what Niklas' Soultrait was, and the others were only Low Tier-0 Lords. They did not stand a chance against him, not after he obtained Eagle Eyes, Fenrir's memories, and the Hardwood Bow.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the auditorium, Alice stopped in her tracks. She let go of Michael's wrist and turned to him. In the next few seconds, she observed him from head to toe.

"Betting your Epic Artifact was either extremely smart or utterly foolish. Do you even know how exceptional my brother's archery skills are?" She scolded Michael, but he could only give it a shrug.

Alice's words seemed more like a compliment to him. If her brother was so talented, why didn't he win the archery competition in the first place?

Well, the answer was nothing spectacular because it was mostly owed to the advantages at Michael's disposal, but he didn't really care.

"How are we going to deal with your brother's debt? I am in need of Mythic Summoning Scrolls, so you can pay me with a bunch of them if you want," Michael said in a half-joking, half-serious tone.

He had spent a lot of time coming up with strategies for the development path of his territory in the past few days. Michael realized that Extraction could be utilized best on monster corpses. He made the most gains whenever he dissected their body near perfectly.

That was also why he felt that it would be great if he could summon a few Summons with a high star rating. If one or two summons like the 3-Star Water Elemental Mage appeared in his territory, the hunting prowess of his combat unit would increase exponentially!

Of course, it was not that easy to summon subjects like Kelia Tan. Michael was fully aware of that. However, it was one of the fastest ways to increase his strength.

The more monsters his combat units could hunt every day, the more Summoning Scrolls and Summoning Scroll Fragments he could extract daily.

That way, he could increase the number of his subjects rapidly. Most subjects would be Starless Summons but they could be trained with the right techniques and enough time as well.

Unfortunately, Alice Zenovia stared at him as if he was an idiot.

"You know how rare Mythic Summoning Scrolls are, right? They're several times more expensive than Named Summoning Scrolls...and those cost already 50 times more than Ordinary Summoning Scrolls on average," She explained, but Michael was already aware of the market value of Mythic Summoning Scrolls.

A single Mythic Summoning Scroll was usually auctioned in the millions. That was how much a Summon with, at least, 2-Star was worth, no matter what their occupation was.

On the contrary, the market value of Ordinary Summoning Scrolls was somewhere between 2,000 to 5,000\$ when the supply was high. The demand for them was always extremely high, but that was only given.

After all, more subjects in his territory would mean that Michael's War Rune would have more Links of Loyalty, which would reinforce his Soultraits' power output.

If that was not enough, more subjects also meant a higher workforce.

Alice frowned the moment she heard him mention Mythic Summoning Scrolls, but she secretly agreed that Tigerfang was valuable enough to be bet against Mythic Summoning Scrolls.

The issue was just that it was not easy to procure that many Mythic Summoning Scrolls.

Alice Zenovia sighed deeply.

"Just tell me what you want, and I will see what I can do for you. Zenovias never forget their debts, even if it's the debt of an idiotic child!"

It was not difficult to tell that the fierce beauty wanted to twist Kaleb's neck and was still upset with him. Michael just smiled at that.

"In that case, can you prepare a few Tier-1 Artifacts for me until the 20th?" He asked.

Alice's ears perked up when she heard him say '20th'. A faint smile blossomed on her face and her interest was piqued.

"Procuring your Artifacts for the aptitude assessment will help you a bit, but it won't help you with all assessment criteria," Alice mumbled and then she began to ponder, "...but it might be for the best, actually..."

Considering Alice's words, Michael thought about something.

'I can settle Kaleb's debt with the Zenovia family by making them buy me a whole set of 3-Star Tier-1 Artifacts, but what did she mean with 'all' assessment criteria? How many criteria are there, in the first place?'

He reconsidered a few things and concluded.

"It would be great if you could provide me with books, so I can study for the aptitude assessment. I guess that there will be a quiz about military stuff and about extra-terrestrial space," Michael requested.

Alice furrowed her brows upon hearing the request. She bit her lower lip in hesitation but agreed with a nod.

"I won't tell you what will be important in the assessment or provide you with any detailed information. The descendants of other families with the same authority as the Zenovia family can procure the information that I will send over to you as well. However, I have a condition!" She said sternly.

Michael looked up at her at the mention of a condition.

"You have to sell Tigerfang to the Zenovia family. Otherwise, I will only give you the full set of Tier-1 Artifacts to settle Kaleb's debt, and no Mythic Summoning Scrolls nor the materials to study for weeks without a break."

Michael didn't think long about it and agreed readily. He stretched his hand out, which Alice took with a subtle smile on her face.

"Of course, you'll have to send me the study material immediately, in paper format to make sure that I can carry it with me to the Origin Expanse," Michael added suddenly, "And I will only sell Tigerfang after the aptitude assessment."

"Other than that, you'll have to give me the Tier-1 Artifact Set before the aptitude assessment!"

Michael smiled brightly at Alice, whose expression contorted.

She had never seen someone being so shameless and shrewd in front of her!

For the first time in a while, she wanted to hit someone other than her brother so badly.

She couldn't do that. There were too many witnesses...unfortunately...

"You...!!"

Chapter 76 Splurge

Even if Michael's demands were shamelessly straightforward, Alice agreed to all of them.

She wanted Tigerfang since their family didn't have many Epic Tier-0 Artifacts.

In fact, they did not have a single natural Epic Tier-0 Artifact. Tigerfang was unique, and it suited Kaleb perfectly.

Her brother had yet to turn 18 and manifest his War Rune to enter the Origin Expanse, but their parents were already working hard to collect the necessary resources for him. An exceptional Tierless Artifact was everything he was missing right now.

Tigerfang was perfect for Kaleb to bind before he entered the Origin Expanse. With Tigerfang, he would be fully prepared for the worst-case scenario. Nobody hoped that the worst-case scenario would occur,

but it was always better to be prepared. And if they had the money or resources, nobody would let the opportunity to grab Tigerfang slip away.

"Alright alright. Give me your address and the study materials will be prepared and sent over to you. It should be done in a few hours..." Alice agreed at last.

She had stepped out of her comfort zone to agree to Michael's conditions but it was for her brother's sake.

Kaleb might have acted like a brainless idiot before, but he was still her brother...and he didn't usually act like today, either.

Alice glared at her brother from afar but that was all she could do at the moment.

"If we're done, I'll leave. Message me the details of the Tier-1 Artifacts you want today or tomorrow, otherwise, I won't be able to procure them before the 20th," She said quickly before leaving.

Alice walked over to her brother, whom she dragged outside the auditorium. Jasmine Blade bowed to Alice and apologized for not paying enough attention to Kaleb, but the fierce beauty ignored Jasmine's existence. That girl was useless in Alice's opinion.

On the other hand, Alice's attitude toward Michael was completely different. The fierce beauty had underestimated his strength, shrewdness, and talent. Something like that didn't happen often.

Meanwhile, Michael just laughed in his mind. He walked past the crowd of people before he left the afterparty with a few final words.

"Send over the money and be quick. It would also do you good to read the penalty clause stated in the contract if you're thinking about suing me."

Since he had a few more hours left until the study material would arrive at his apartment, Michael wanted to make sure that his bank account was filled to the brim. It was about time to splurge some money!

It was late evening when he left the school ground. Michael hailed a shuttle that brought him back to the Central Trading Hall.

He was still wearing the customized suit, but he wanted to change his clothes. Thus, he jumped into a clothing store, and bought some comfortable clothes before he changed into them.

After that, he received a few notifications on the crystal watch.

[2,000,000\$ have been transferred to your account!]

[800,000\$ have been transferred to your account!]

[300,000\$ have been transferred to your account!]

[650,000\$ have been transferred to your account!]

...

"They're pretty fast. Looks like they hate being in debt as well. Or maybe they complained to their families and realized that they couldn't avoid paying me? Not that it matters in any way," Michael mused, feeling satisfied with his small act of revenge against his former classmates.

The afterparty had developed into a fruitful event. Of course, only Michael gained something, but that was all that mattered!

Several million were now safely deposited in his bank account and he could start splurging money now.

However, instead of rushing anything, he entered a bar. He sat down on an empty chair and minded his own business. He had to reconsider what type of Artifacts he should demand from Alice.

The answer was pretty simple at first glance, but it was not that easy, unfortunately.

Michael had to improve his attack power, movement speed, and his defensive tactics. He wanted to continue using a melee weapon, but Michael felt that it was even more important to keep practicing archery.

In fact, commanding his troops as an archer from an elevated position would be much easier. On the other hand, it would be better for his warriors' morale if he were to charge in front of them into their enemies.

Thus, he had to be a little bit more flexible and adjust his combat style to fit the given situation on the battlefield at any time.

Half an hour after he entered the bar, Michael opened his chat with Alice.

[Michael: I think I figured out what Artifacts I want. First, I need a leather armor set – with a protection enchantment if possible. Then, I need a better Bow with adjustable pulling force, a Return Arrow, and Boots that increases Agility. As for the weapon I want, it doesn't matter whether you procure a thin longsword like Tigerfang or a spear. However, it's important that the Weapon Artifact is natural, without enchantment, but has high destructive power to injure Tier-2 Monsters even if I don't hit their vital spots. They shouldn't break from the impact of Tier-2 Monsters' attacks either, so high endurance is also quite important.

Remark: Of course, all Artifacts should be Tier-1, preferably 3-Star.]

Michael sent the message the moment he finished writing it. Afterward, he re-read it and frowned deeply as he recalled something.

[Michael: It would be great if the Artifacts' external enhancement could strengthen my perception and Agility the most.

By the way, If I you think that I am asking for too much, don't shout at me but deduct the price from what you would give me for Tigerfang!]

The external enhancement of Tier-1 Artifacts was much better than Tierless Artifacts. A natural Epic Artifact like Tigerfang was an exception to that rule, but it was not worth keeping Tigerfang if he could make better use of it in other ways after he advanced to the 1st Tier.

Michael would have requested more Artifacts from Alice, but he was unsure if his body would be able to endure the external enhancements of the Artifacts he had requested. Thus, he refrained from being even more shameless than he was already.

In the end, he didn't ask Alice about a specific number of Mythic Summoning Scrolls in exchange for Tigerfang. That was mostly for Alice to adjust the number according to the final assessment.

He wished to bleed her out and exploit her to the fullest, but Michael decided to refrain himself. He felt that it wouldn't be the last time that he met Alice. It was more likely for them to meet each other quite often in the future.

After he sent the last message to Alice, he left his home address in their chat as well. Then, he received a few more notifications.

The remaining money had arrived!

Since he was now in possession of a body refining technique, and about to obtain a full set of Tier-1 Artifacts, Michael could spend his money differently.

He entered the House of Witchery and bought a bunch of alchemy recipes, and rare blueprints such as the Medicine House Blueprint, and an Intermediate Ranch Blueprint.

Other than that, Michael chose to invest in Tiara's combat prowess.

Tiara had a War Rune, which meant that he could increase her strength externally with the use of Artifacts.

She was already a Tier-1 Battle Maid. Thus, a rapid increase in her strength would enhance his territory's military power exponentially.

Michael bought a bunch of Artifacts for Tiara, and he paid immediately.

The total cost of today's trip to the House of Witchery cost him more than six million dollars. It was painful to look at his rapidly declining finances, but he was satisfied with his purchases nonetheless when he left the shop again.

Meanwhile, the staff members could only stare at each other dumbfoundedly.

They'd seen Michael a few times by now and knew who he was.

"Our manager really has great eyes... I thought that he would be punished for handing out a Golden Bartholomew Membership Card so easily, but he was praised for his great KPI over the last few days..." One of them said, only for the other to agree wholeheartedly.

"Our manager has great eyes for young talent and opportunities, that is for sure!"

They all nodded at each other as they looked at the retreating figure of Michael as he walked with a confident stride and planned his future endeavors.

Just like that, Michael had become a little treasure of the House of Witchery.

Chapter 77 Heightened Perception

Once his shopping spree was over, Michael returned home.

Several boxes filled with study materials were already waiting for him at the doorstep, in addition to a well-clothed gentleman, who asked for his Lord ID and signature.

Michael noticed ripples of energy around the well-clothed gentleman, and it didn't take long before he realized that he was one of the Zenovia family's butlers.

'Even their butlers are Awakened? That is...not really unexpected...' Michael concluded after a second or two.

Once the formalities had been completed, the butler disappeared after a short bow. Michael wanted to say something to the butler but he had already disappeared. It was as if he had never been in front of his apartment.

"Weird..."

He opened his messenger and informed Alice that he had received the study materials and thanked her once again before he stored everything inside his War Rune.

Afterward, he entered the apartment and manifested the Runic Gate in the living room.

A few minutes later, he had changed his clothes once again and returned to the Origin Expanse.

'I have 20 days left in the Origin Expanse. That should be enough to advance to the 1st Tier, and expand my territory. I should be ready for the aptitude assessment by then!'

Michael emerged in his room inside the wooden manor a second later. He wanted to use the opportunity to bring Tiara her new Artifacts and store away the new goods he had purchased.

However, upon looking outside, he noticed that it was well past midnight.

"I am way too excited to go sleep now...Should I try the Berserker Physique body refinement technique?" He asked himself before he retrieved the technique naturally.

Michael channeled some energy into the Gloa crystal that had been put on the nightstand next to his bed, and a dim light illuminated the room.

It was bright enough to read, which was more than enough for now.

He opened the first page of the body refinement technique and started reading.

For the next few hours, Michael did nothing but read and comprehend. Every last trace of exhaustion was wiped off his body as he grew engrossed in reading. But he did not allow himself to be overly excited. Instead of blindly refining his body and making countless mistakes, it was necessary to understand the technique's special perks. He didn't want to cripple his body accidentally by rushing into anything. However, that was only obvious.

Michael gained a general understanding of the Berserker Physique. The first level was not that difficult, and it was nearly impossible to make a mistake. Thus, Michael started his first workout since he entered the Origin Expanse.

The energy and nutrition inside his body were quickly burned to nourish his muscles as he began the workout.

Less than half an hour later, Michael's energy was drained, and he was lying on the ground, panting like a dog. His clothes were drenched in sweat, and it felt like every muscle in his body had been subjected to extreme wear and tear and trained to the point of unbearable soreness.

However, Michael was quite satisfied. The body refinement technique was much better than he would have expected. It may use a tremendous amount of energy and nutrition to be utilized efficiently, but he could tell that practicing the Berserker Physique technique repetitively would strengthen his entire body.

He was unsure how much his physique would improve after completing the first level, but it was something to look forward to.

Despite being exhausted after burning the midnight oil in reading, Michael forced himself to adjust his position. He sat on the ground cross-legged and started practicing the Sun Soldier Breathing technique.

Michael hadn't received the chance to test the special perk of the Sun Soldier's Breathing technique before, but now that he was dead-tired and drained of energy, Michael felt that it was about time.

The special perk of the Sun Soldier's Breathing technique stated that one had a high chance to enter a state of increased sense of perception immediately after a tiring workout. The harsher the practitioner's condition, the higher the chances of epiphany, a sudden moment of realization where one would feel as if all of his senses received a huge influx of energy!

But what did that even mean? Michael was not sure about that at first. Practicing the Sun Soldier's Breathing technique shouldn't require something like an epiphany to be practiced. It was a breathing technique that required lots of practice to be perfected, or so he thought.

Only when he started to practice the Sun Soldier's Breathing technique after he was too exhausted to breathe properly did he realize how wrong he had been?

Following the steps of the Sun Soldier's Breathing technique, his energy replenished rapidly. It felt like the energy around him was flooding his body. His pores slowly opened, allowing the energy to stream inside him in tidal waves.

Time seemed to slow down as the energy invaded his body. It replenished the energy Michael had used up to practice the Berserker Physique within minutes before nourishing his exhausted muscles. The soreness all over his body was washed away and his muscles were nourished.

This stunned Michael. Was that the epiphany mentioned?

'That shouldn't be it. The breathing technique stimulated the absorption rate of the Origin Expanse's energy just now...but what about the utility of my stamina? The Sun Soldier's Breathing technique should improve the utility of stamina and absorption rate of energy...'

But what if he could use the stimulation to increase his proficiency of the Sun Soldier's Breathing technique?

So far, he had only practiced the first version of the Sun Soldier's Breathing technique. However, there was a second version that changed the practitioner's breathing fundamentally. To achieve a fundamental change in his breathing, Michael required a deep understanding of his body and the technique's first version.

The body and mind will have to learn to breathe in a specific way, which will then lead to a decrease in the consumption of Stamina and the natural absorption of the Origin Expanse's energy.

Making use of the exhausted energy channel and soreness of my body after practicing the Berserker Physique will be quite beneficial. And adding the increased sense of perception from practicing the Sun Soldier's Breathing technique right after the workout to deepen the understanding of my body and the breathing technique should be able to progress faster...Is that the epiphany they mentioned?'

Michael was not so sure about that anymore.

He was also unsure how much time passed before he stopped practicing the Sun Soldier's Breathing technique, or when he fell asleep on the ground.

However, what he knew was that the sun had risen above the horizon when he woke up again.

The sounds of his subjects getting ready for the day's work reached his ears and he got up from the ground. Michael rubbed the back of his head in confusion, but he regained his composure not long after.

He stretched his body a bit to test whether his physique had improved or not, but there was no noteworthy change.

"It has only been a single day. It's not like my physique will improve drastically right away. Training requires time, even with a body refinement technique!" Michael told himself before he left his room.

He felt a little bit more energetic than before and it felt like the air around him was fresher than usual, but Michael didn't pay much attention to this.

He thought that his emotions influenced the way he sensed his surroundings. And he was excited and happy because he had finally gotten revenge against the people who had harassed him in the past. They paid their price – quite literally – and Michael didn't have to see them again.

How could he not be happy and excited?!

Chapter 78 Focused

After Michael finished practicing the Sun Soldier's Breathing technique, he took a quick bath in one of the temporary bathrooms that had been build next to the wooden manor.

He met up with Tiara afterward, and presented her the three Artifacts he had purchased for her.

"Because you already have Fenrir's silver spear, I think it would be better to purchase a few different types of Artifacts," Michael said as he handed the Artifacts over.

Tiara stared dumbfoundedly at the round-shield, the Plazarit Chestplate and the set of boots she was given. Her eyes began to quiver and she opened her mouth, but nothing except a puff of air escaped her lips.

"All three armaments are natural 3-Star Tier-1 Artifacts without enchantments. They'll increase your Agility, Endurance and Strength greatly!"

Michael left out the fact that these three Artifacts cost him six million dollar since they were natural Artifacts with great external enhancements, but that was not something Tiara had to know, in the first place.

The better Tiara's equipment, the higher her combat prowess. An increase in her combat prowess was equivalent to an increase of his military might. Of course, he would invest into that!

"M-master...I I cannot acc—" Tiara began, but Michael had already lifted his hand to intercept her.

"You will accept the Artifacts, and you will bind them to your War Rune. Your survivability is important, whether it is as my Battle Maid, or as the commander of the territory's military!" He said in a serious tone that didn't allow objection.

Tiara lowered her head and nodded faintly, "As you command, Master!"

Michael raised an eyebrow at this, but he didn't say anything.

"Is the daily report already compiled?" He asked instead.

Tiara's head flicked upward and she nodded much more vigorously than before.

"The report should be done now," She said, turning around to dash away and pick up the daily report.

A minute later, she returned with a piece of paper in her hands.

Tiara handed Michael the daily report, which he read through within a few minutes.

Once he was done, a faint smile appeared on his face.

"A 1-Star Enchanter Novice finally emerged. That's great!"

Enchanter was a person who did exactly what the occupation's title suggested. They enchanted items, or created enchantment arrays such as the preservation enchantment array.

It was extremely expensive and time-consuming to train an Enchanter from scratch according to the information Michael had learned in high school, but that was mostly because the basics were hard to comprehend and quite confusing.

With an Enchanter Novice, one didn't have such a problem. Most Enchanter Novices had to pass a test before they were accepted as a Novice. Thus, Michael was quite lucky.

"Bring the 1-Star Enchanter to the temporary library for now. He should study as much as possible until I've procured a few blueprints, recipes and the necessary resources for him to start working," Michael ordered before he noticed something else, "There is also a 1-Star Botanist...that's also great. He can take care of the seeds I bought."

Michael fell deep into thoughts reading through the daily report.

His territory now had the Trio of Basic Lifestyle Occupations; an Alchemist, Blacksmith and Enchanter. Though they were all in the Apprentice, and Novice stage, he had purchased more than enough books, recipes, and blueprints for all of them to study.

The trio could be utilized greatly once they finished studying, which meant that Michael could now focus on gardening in the Untamed Jungle.

Initially, he purchased some Tierless seeds to test the fertility of the Untamed Jungle's soil since he was not adept with gardening and raising plants. But now that he had a Botanist, and a Gardener, Michael could change his approach a little.

He could start gardening mystic plants, valuable flowers, and all ordinary materials that were required by the Alchemist and Enchanter.

"Since everything grows much faster in the Origin Expanse, we should make detailed statistics to find out the fertility of the Untamed Jungle," Tiara proposed.

Michael agreed without a second thought. Everyone knew that the energy of the Origin Expanse allowed both monsters and plants to mature at a much faster rate. In fact, the energy of the Origin Expanse stimulated mutations as well. However, that was something the Botanist and Gardener would have to pay attention to when gardening.

'Thanks to the Water Elemental Mage we have more than enough water as well. She filled several huge barrels with water, good thinking.'

'The others found more fruits, Tiatcha Trees and Cacao trees. The trees were already moved to the temporary tree farm as well. Nice.'

Michael made mental comments and was satisfied with his team's progress as he read through the daily report. He made a few mental notes about the things he had to focus on, and what projects could be postponed.

Once he was done, he returned the daily report.

"I will make a priority list of construction projects that have to be completed. I brought a few blueprints back, and we will have to construct them sooner or later," For her next task, Michael told her to spend the next hour to bind the new Artifacts to her War Rune and adjust to the external enhancements they provide.

Tiara was a bit hesitant but returned to her room reluctantly.

Meanwhile, Michael's gaze roamed across his territory and inspected it. He was proud of the progress he and his subjects had achieved since he became a Lord.

His subjects had been given tasks that would keep them busy for several days before he had left the Origin Expanse to be at the graduation ceremony. That was also why everyone was already bustling even though it was still early in the morning.

It was almost as if his territory would never turn silent again.

Michael felt elated at this sight. Goosebumps spread all over his skin.

"Let's work hard to continue progressing as fast as possible!" He reminded himself in excitement before he went over to the Bilrox's hut.

Since Alice sent him several big boxes full of study materials, Michael decided to make use of them. He sat down next to the Bilrox hatchling's nest before he retrieved the first book.

Meanwhile, the Bilrox hatchlings chirped loudly, trying to attract his attention. They started to prick him with their beaks when he continued to ignore them, only to climb up on his lap and sleep when all attempts failed.

Michael was not disturbed by the sounds around him when he studied. As weird as it may seem, loud voices allowed him to focus more on the words written on the paper. He had to concentrate more on reading, which allowed him to enter a highly focused state.

This highly focused state allowed him to study much better.

The following four days passed in the blink of an eye. Michael focused on studying and playing with the Bilrox hatchlings, which were growing much faster than expected.

However, on the 4th day after his return, Michael left the Origin Expanse once again. He had to purchase a few things and sell the body parts of Monsters he had dissected.

In less than three hours he returned to the Origin Expanse.

However, what he didn't expect to have happened in the brief period he left the Origin Expanse was that Blaire Tracer returned from her exploration outside the territory.

She was out of breath and had crucial information in her hands, waiting to be delivered to him!

Chapter 79 Worth Of Equality

Blaire Tracer had recuperated from her severe injury a long time ago.

It had been a while since she started to leave the territory to explore the surroundings of the Untamed Jungle. Her task was to note down every single detail about the unknown territory so that Michael received a detailed report of the jungle.

However, today was different from usual.

Blaire returned to the territory panting heavily. Her long hair was dripping with sweat and clung to her face. She was beyond exhausted and scratches all over her arms and face showed that she had hastily rushed back to the territory with all her might.

"I found a large clearing southward.... A huge Frenzy Deer, much stronger and bigger than the Frenzy Deers we encounter every now and then is lying there.... It is injured and more than a dozen corpses of

Frenzy Deers are spread across the clearing as well. I don't know who or what it fought but I also saw a few patches of black hair. The Frenzy Deer probably drove away the enemy..." Blaire reported hastily while trying to catch her breath.

"Weren't you searching for easy prey? The Deer is probably Tier-2, or at least at the Peak of the 1st Tier, and it is severely injured! It's also a leader of a horde with more than a hundred Frenzy Deers!"

Blaire seemed excited to Michael as she reported the situation to him. Since she made a big blunder in the past, Blaire reported the situation immediately in the hopes of redeeming herself in her Lord's eyes. She didn't dare to act on her own like she did when she encountered the Gogi Lord's territory for the first time.

Fortunately, nobody died because of her blunder, but Michael had been in several life-and-death situations to rectify her mistake. Since she had made him suffer a lot, she wanted to help her Lord become stronger quickly. Hunting an injured Tier-2 Monster was the perfect way to achieve that!

Michael's interest was piqued when he heard her. He immediately told Blaire to take a seat and tell him more about the situation.

Blaire, the Tracker, seemed a little bit impatient to rush over and kill the huge Frenzy Deer while it was still injured, but Michael didn't just run towards the deer blindly. The huge Frenzy Deer would still stay injured for a few hours.

Furthermore, Michael's military might was not strong enough to deal with a horde of more than a hundred Tier-1 Frenzy Deers easily.

The population of his territory was slowly inching closer to 350, but that didn't mean he was fortunate enough to summon many combat units.

In total, he had summoned two 1-Star Warriors and two 1-Star Archers during the last four days. It was nothing great, but it was more than the gains most other Lords made.

"A one-hour walking distance southward. That's closer than expected," Michael mumbled.

If the huge Frenzy Deer was truly a Tier-2 Monster, the situation would be more problematic than he first expected. After all, the death of a dozen Low Tier-1 Frenzy Deers and the severe injury of a Tier-2 Frenzy Deer suggested that there was something stronger nearby.

A one-hour walking distance was insignificant. That meant the moment the huge Frenzy Deer and its horde were hunted down by him, Michael and his territory would probably turn into the next prey of the stronger monster.

Despite the risks, Michael was interested in finding out more.

If the huge Frenzy Deer was able to drive away the other monster, it was probably injured as well, or not much stronger than the huge Frenzy Deer.

'Maybe, I can deal with both? Killing two Tier-2 Monsters should be more than enough to refine my War Rune to the peak and beyond...' Michael figured, suddenly feeling hopeful.

During the last few days, Michael's War Rune had reached the late stage. At first, he thought that everyone was joking whenever Adventurers and Lords said that the refinement degree slowed down drastically upon reaching the late stage, but it was true. The energy he had required to progress from the Mid-stage to the Late stage was not even a tenth of the energy required to refine his War Rune to the Peak stage.

That was something Michael found out during the last few days.

It was quite shocking, but it made sense.

Every Lord and Adventurer complained about the tremendous amount of energy required to improve their Tier and refinement degree. Most Lords spent half a year, or a full year to advance to the 1st Tier. Meanwhile, Michael wanted to make a speedrun to the 1st Tier to be ready for the aptitude assessment of the Sapphirelake Military Academy.

Unfortunately, it was not that easy.

He would have to take a few risks to make that happen.

Thus, Michael prepared to wage war with the huge Frenzy Deer and the unknown monster.

'Preparing to fight the huge Frenzy Deer is one thing, but how many Warriors should I leave behind for the protection of the territory?' He contemplated.

In the first place, it would be better if he could bring his entire military to the clearing. The huge Frenzy Deer might be injured, but it was quite powerful if it led a horde of more than 100 Tier-1 Frenzy Deers.

He had nine Warriors, two Archers, two Knights in training, two Aero Crossbowmen, a Water Elemental Mage, Tiara, and himself. That was a total of 18 people who could fight, and only one of them was in the 1st Tier...

Michael and the Water Elemental Mage were strong despite being Tierless, but the others had to make use of their teamwork to fight larger groups of Tier-1 Monsters, forget about Tier-2 Monsters.

"If you're worried about the protection of the territory, there is no need," Tiara said when she arrived at the open pavilion.

She had overheard bits of Blaire's report and could clearly tell what Michael was worried about.

"More than 150 people have learned how to throw spears. We also collected enough spears from the Gogis to train the Starless Summons. Additionally, they also studied the Sun Soldier's Weaponry technique to learn spear-throwing. It was one of the easiest techniques to learn given the circumstances," She explained shortly.

"They might not be strong individually, but the high number makes up for the lack of quality. Tier-1 Monsters won't be able to endure the downpour of 150 spears shot at them!"

'They learned how to throw spears? So many of them?'

Michael was confused. He had expected just a few summons to be dissatisfied with their Star rating and give their utmost to train in order to attain enlightenment and be promoted to 1-Star Warriors.

However, he didn't expect so many to start training in spear-throwing. Was there a special reason?

Michael had no idea.

"Everyone is thankful for what you're doing. They can tell that you care about all of us, even those without a star rating. You are not biased and treat everyone fairly despite a difference in their rating. That means a lot to them, and they wanted to express their gratitude," Blaire said suddenly.

It had been a while since the first Starless Summons began to study the Sun Soldier's Breathing technique and the Sun Soldier's Weaponry technique.

However, a majority of them had begun to focus on their training only a few days ago when Michael returned with countless recipes, and blueprints that were mostly focused on the improvement of the territory's living conditions.

Everyone got to know that Tiara was given several Tier-1 Artifacts and that her survivability and combat prowess increased drastically.

As if that was not enough, Michael left no stone unturned to ensure that the Bilrox hatchlings would receive the best possible nourishment.

Rather than a Lord, he acted like the head of a big family, who was doting and genuinely cared about every single individual.

This warmed his subjects' hearts, and it strengthened their Link of Loyalty drastically.

They wanted to assist their Lord!

Tiara smiled brightly and added, "They trained hard, hoping that their hard work would help you in the future."

Chapter 80 A Monster's Massacre

Michael was glad that his subjects began practicing the Sun Soldier techniques on their own.

Their initiative allowed him to use his full military might to fight the huge Frenzy Deer, instead of leaving some Warriors behind to safeguard the territory.

Interestingly, no monster had attacked his territory since the protection barrier had been lifted. It was almost as if the monsters had been traumatized by watching their brethren die near Michael's territory.

That was a good thing since it allowed Michael to be a little bit more at ease and not worry about his territory getting razed to the ground while he was away.

Thus, he gathered his forces, finished a few preparations for the upcoming battle, and ordered Blaire to guide them to the clearing.

Just like Blaire reported, they spent roughly an hour traveling southward until they came across a huge clearing in the middle of the Untamed Jungle.

The clearing was much bigger than the clearing in his territory, and there was a small stream as well. The stream passed through the middle of the clearing, providing water to the horde of Frenzy Deers.

Michael was just about to climb a tree to look at the surroundings from an elevated position when the earth beneath them trembled.

A horrifying roar reverberated through the clearing, and they all looked around hastily as a big monster charged out of the thicket less than a hundred meters away from Michael's position.

His heart skipped a beat, and his body froze for a moment.

'A Black Bear? Are there monsters like that in the Untamed Jungle?'

Michael was confused for a moment, but he regained his composure quickly. He gestured for the others to hide in the thicket around the clearing and remain silent. In the meantime, he climbed the tree and activated his Eagle Eyes.

Once he found a thick branch, he flung himself on top of it. The tree was wide enough to walk on, but Michael didn't bother. He used his Eagle Eyes to observe the chaotic scene beneath him.

The tranquil and beautiful scenery of the clearing was replaced by sounds of snarling.

A huge black bear with long sabretooth-like fangs appeared in front of a group of Frenzy Deers letting out a ferocious roar. It dug its fangs deep into the closest Frenzy Deer and thrashed around violently. The Frenzy Deer could do nothing but bleat in horror as it was tossed and turned for two seconds before it was mercilessly thrown aside.

The Black Bear left the severely injured Frenzy Deer to die and did not bother looking at it again. Instead, it attacked the other Frenzy Deers that bleated out in horror as they scampered for their lives. However, the Black Bear was too fast.

It appeared next to the second victim in an instant and tore it apart with its razor-sharp claws. The Frenzy Deer didn't even get the time to process the pain before it staggered and slumped to the ground lifelessly. A puddle of blood formed on the ground around the Frenzy Deer and the bright shimmer in its eyes turned dim and disappeared a moment later.

Yet again, the Black Bear didn't cast a look at its victim.

'It is not hunting to feed itself. No, it doesn't even seem to enjoy playing around with its prey. The bear is simply tearing the Deers apart. It's a brutal massacre, nothing more!' Michael realized in shock.

It was not as if Michael was taken aback by the Black Bear's massacre, but it was rather uncommon for something like that to happen. The mindless massacre was not something ordinary monsters would do under normal circumstances.

Even Lords killed monsters to collect their bodies and sell them. Michael was the same. He wanted the energy influx of the huge Frenzy Deer, its horde, and the resources he could procure by killing them, not killing them and leaving their bodies to rot.

Though it did not make him any less of a killer, and it was not necessary to hunt the Frenzy Deers, every part of their body was quite valuable, including the energy influx they provided upon getting killed.

'Is it also after the energy influx? But I thought that monsters of the Origin Expanse would absorb the energy in their vicinity through their Cores. They don't absorb the energy of other monsters by killing them!'

Hunting the Frenzy Deer Horde didn't seem to provide the Black Bear with any gains, yet it slaughtered them mindlessly.

Michael didn't have to care about the reasoning behind the Black Bear's actions, but he felt that something was amiss. Unfortunately, he couldn't find out what it was.

Michael climbed down the tree and returned to the others while the Bear was busy slaughtering the deers. Then, he and his team used the densely grown vicinity to walk around the clearing.

The huge Frenzy Deer and the vast majority of its herd were on the clearing's left side. Michael wanted to get as close as possible to them before revealing himself.

The noises of the angry battle raging inside the densely grown Untamed Jungle echoed loudly. Michael and the others could clearly hear the desperately bleating Frenzy Deers and the enraged bleat of the huge Frenzy Dear, followed up by the thunderous roar of the Black Bear.

They clashed not long after, but Michael and the others weren't able to see what was happening. Only after Michael, the Archers and the Aero Crosbowmen climbed the largest tree in the vicinity were they able to get a better view of the clearing.

More than thirty Frenzy Deers had been killed, and half of the remaining horde had disappeared in the Untamed Jungle.

The rest of the horde was uncertain about what they should do. Some stared at the Black Bear in hatred, while others were sniffing the bloody corpses of their brethren and trying to make them move.

However, the Black Bear was not completely unharmed. It had two big wounds on his chest where the huge Frenzy Deer's antlers had pierced through its body. It had used its entire strength and massive size to pick up the Black Bear on its head and hurl it to the side. In retaliation, the Black Bear clawed the huge Frenzy Deer, inflicting two more deep gashes in its shoulder.

Fountains of blood gushed out of the huge Frenzy Deer's injuries as it staggered back, while the Black Bear got up from the ground again.

It had been pierced through its chest and lost a massive amount of blood as well. Nonetheless, it was clear who was at an advantage.

"Prepare to attack the Black Bear once it gets closer!" Michael ordered the Archers and Aero Crossbowmen as he retrieved the Hardwood Bow and the Return Arrow.

He channeled enough energy into the Hardwood Bow to enhance it to the limit. This increased pulling force increased drastically. Michael could barely pull the bowstring back after the Return Arrow was nocked and in position.

His Eagle Eyes were fully unleashed, and able to detect the finest details of the Black Bear that was clashing with the huge Frenzy Deer 200 meters away from their location.

Michael adjusted the bow's angle a few times from his elevated position of more than twenty meters above the ground before he released the Return Arrow.

A loud hissing sound rang through the vicinity as the arrow was released.

The arrow cut through the air with terrifying velocity in the next instance and approached the Black Bear's head rapidly.

The Black Bear's maw was wide open, and its fangs were about to dig into the huge Frenzy Deer's neck when a sharp bolt of pain erupted through its mouth.

From one moment to the next, something sharp pierced through the inner side of its mouth, making it roar in pain!

The pain distracted the Black Bear, and it lost its footing. Enraged, it crunched down on the object, intending to break it.

However, the object had already disappeared from around the Black Bear.

The Return Arrow dematerialized, returning to Michael's hand where he nocked it on the bowstring once again.

"Let's have some fun, you violent bastard!"