

Supreme Lord 91

Chapter 91 Experiment

'Untouched Monster Corpses, and the corpse of an extra-terrestrial Adventurer? What do you want to...No, forget it...'

The Clerk halted in his tracks and the professional smile plastered on his face crumbled for a moment, revealing utter confusion beneath. However, he regained his composure just a moment later and nodded his head.

"Untouched Monster Corpses and the corpses of recently killed Monsters cost more than ordinary Monster carcasses, but I think that you're aware of that. As for the corpse of an extra-terrestrial Adventurer...it can be quite expensive," He said and added lightly, "But you can use the appraisal room with your Golden Bartholomew Membership. That's no problem!"

Michael expected to be frowned upon a little bit more, but that didn't happen. It was quite interesting that his weird request was accepted just like that.

The Clerk gave somebody a quick call before they entered the appraisal room.

Ten minutes later, they finished their business. Michael sold the corpses of the monsters he and his team had hunted in the lizard cave, and he was about to sign the deal to increase his fortune by a small fortune once again.

However, before they could sign the deal, Michael received the corpses he had requested. The Clerk left him alone in the appraisal room where four monster carcasses and the body of an extra-terrestrial Adventurer were spread out on separate tables.

Michael was not sure what kind of extra-terrestrial race the Adventurer had belonged to, but he had a Tier-0 War Rune on the back of his right hand – or what he presumed to be his right hand.

Michael closed his eyes for a moment. He sensed the Symbol of Extraction deep inside his consciousness and exerted the Soultrait. Several golden streams shot out of his palms. They spread through the appraisal room and started to extract the five corpses.

Merely two minutes later, Michael was done. The corpses were near-perfectly dissected, but not a single SoulStar Fragment or any item created by the Will of the Origin Expanse had appeared.

"Usually, it doesn't matter whether the corpses are looted inside or outside the Origin Expanse so it is of no importance...let's conduct another test..." Michael mumbled to himself. He got an idea and left the appraisal room and turned to the clerk, who was waiting for him.

"I need another batch with the same criteria," He requested.

"I want to sell the dissected corpses as well. I don't need them anymore."

In the next 15 minutes, Michael waited for the new batch of corpses. He sold the dissected body parts and signed the deal for the other goods in the meantime.

When his goods arrived, Michael stored them inside the spatial space of his War Rune before he set off.

As he left, Michael's actions attracted the interest of the House of Witchery's Staff.

"That was weird," One of them commented.

"Even if it was weird, it's even more confusing how he dissected five bodies nearly perfectly in less than five minutes. Either time passes differently for him, or he is a godly butcher!" Another one mumbled, just for a third to join the conversation,

"I wonder what he's trying to do with those corpses. It has been a while since anyone was even remotely interested in the corpses of Tier-0 Adventurers of a foreign race. Our esteemed customer doesn't look like a scientist either."

"We might never be able to find out what is going on in the mind of our customers...but maybe it is better that way..." The first said, and the others nodded their heads in agreement.

Maybe it was better not to know what weird thoughts were running through their customers' minds. They were simple clerks who did their mundane job and returned home after work hours.

Now that he finished his purchases, Michael returned to the Origin Expanse.

He extracted the untouched monster corpses and the corpse of the extra-terrestrial Adventurer inside the Origin Expanse, but the result stayed the same.

"Does that mean, I or my subjects have to kill the monsters for Extraction to increase the special loot created by the Will? No, that shouldn't be it. I used Extraction on the Frenzy Deer horde and most of them were killed by the Black Bear. In that case...does that mean I have to be in the vicinity when monsters die for Extraction to work properly on them?' Michael tried to come up with multiple theories but most of them could be proven wrong quickly.

"It's obvious that Extraction works on the monsters killed by me or my subjects. My subjects are directly connected to my soul through the Link of Loyalty. There is not much to debate...but what about the monsters killed by others?'

Michael came up with several theories that couldn't be proven wrong immediately.

First, corpses weren't allowed to leave the Origin Expanse, otherwise, Extraction wouldn't be able to increase the loot generated by the Will of the Origin Expanse.

Second, he had to be in the proximity of the monsters when they killed others for Extraction to work properly.

Third, monsters killed in the vicinity of his territory would meet the requirements to provide additional special drops according to Extraction's star rating.

There were more theories, but Michael considered these three as the most important for the time being. If he was to travel to Xiltra and purchase a few corpses, he could continue his experiment, and prove the first theory to be right, or wrong.

However, he didn't have the time to travel to Xiltra right now. Michael had yet to advance to the 1st Tier, and the day of the aptitude assessment was inching closer.

'I should hurry a bit.' He thought, before joining Tiara and the others to go out hunting again.

After all, the fastest way to refine his War Rune was to go out and hunt powerful monsters!

A few days later, it was already the 18th of the Month outside the Origin Expanse. In two days the Sapphirelake Military Academy's aptitude assessment will be held.

Michael was extremely tired, but he left the Origin Expanse with a faint smile on his lips.

Given the tremendous amount of energy sweeping through his body, he should have more than enough energy to refine his War Rune past the Peak of Tier-0. He had more than enough to break the barrier and advance to the 1st Tier.

However, instead of staying inside the Origin Expanse, Michael met up with his brother.

It had been a few days since Michael and Danny's last meeting, and it was about time that they spent some quality time together.

Who knew how much more time they would receive after Michael was accepted in the Sapphirelake Military Academy?

Like usual, the brothers went out to fill their stomachs to the brim. They spoke a lot while taking care of their endless hunger.

"By the way, how has your expedition been? Seeing that you're not injured, it should have been a success...but you never know," Michael asked with great interest. The more he researched about structures of forgotten civilizations, and creations of the Origin Expanse's Will the more interested he grew.

Danny smiled when he saw Michael's eyes that twinkled brightly in curiosity.

"The expedition was a great success. We gained a lot more than we anticipated. It looks like the Primedival Pyramid is even more valuable than we thought at first. In a few weeks we'll enter the inner area of the Primedival Pyramid, once we finish preparing thoroughly for the dangers lurking inside," He said with a trace of excitement in his voice.

Danny usually tried to hide his emotions and act unbothered, but even he found it increasingly difficult to hide his excitement in front of his brother. He wanted to brag to Michael but held back as much as he could.

After all, he knew Michael very well.

His brother would only hear about the treasures and ignore that it was extremely dangerous to conquer any kind of ancient building or creation of the Origin Expanse!

What Danny didn't know yet was that Michael had already found an old temple and that he hadn't rushed inside like a maniac.

Thinking about the old temple, Michael's shot up from his chair.

His eyes widened and a bright smile formed on his lips.

'Maybe Danny can tell me more about the language used in the old temple!'

Chapter 92 Help

Danny stared at Michael with a frown when his brother jumped up from the chair.

Michael's sudden action startled him at first. Then he grew increasingly more confused.

When Michael realized that he nearly flung the table in front of him aside, he sat down quietly. He smiled in embarrassment and sipped on his water to calm down his heart.

Afterward, he stared deep into his brother's eyes. A piece of paper appeared in Michael's hand with a few sentences written on them.

'Good thing that I wrote everything down beforehand,' He mused to himself before he handed Danny the piece of paper.

The sentences written down on the piece of paper were related to the strange information he had received from the old temple when he stepped on the first step of the ancient stone staircase.

"What is that?" Danny asked as he took a first look at the content written down on the paper and furrowed his eyebrows.

'He cannot understand what's written there?' Michael realized, and his mood worsened quickly. However, instead of being discouraged that his brother was unable to translate what was written on the paper, Michael calmed his heart and mind.

He looked straight into his brother's eyes and began to detail his escapade. Michael didn't leave out any information, thinking that it might be important.

Danny had already figured that he lived in a dangerous region, so he might as well share all the information to make sure that his brother could give him some good pieces of advice.

Since both of them had become Lords and Michael gained more experience, it was much easier to talk to Danny about the Origin Expanse and their situations.

"I wanted to research a bit more about that temple in the underground ecosystem, but it's not easy to find information using the low authority of my Lord ID. Even the Bartholomew Network is not that helpful. After all, most Lords and Adventurers who have gone on expeditions to conquer temples, ruins, and other mythical places of the Origin Expanse don't share many useful pieces of information about the situations they've encountered," Michael complained at the end of his story.

He sighed deeply and shook his head in disappointment.

Meanwhile, Danny stared at his brother with squinted eyes.

"So you're telling me that you found a temple less than a month after your 18th birthday? That...has to be a joke..." Danny mumbled to himself in disbelief.

However, after hearing what Michael's first Soultrait was, and that his first summon was a Heroic Summon; their first ancestor, to be precise, finding a temple belonging to a forgotten civilization didn't seem all that special.

Danny opened Starnet on his crystal watch and did a quick research. He searched for the names Michael had mentioned; Untamed Jungle, Xiltrá, and the Zentika Empire.

With his authority as Tier-2 Lord, Danny could find the same report as Michael found using Bartholomew Network with his Golden Membership. It was not a lot, but enough to worry about Michael's safety.

His brother seemed fine, but his region and the regions adjacent to the Untamed Jungle didn't seem all that secure.

"I told you about my situation because I want you to share more about your expedition and the dangers of the Primedival Pyramid. If you don't want me to be blinded by the treasures, I might be able to procure in the old temple, it would be better to share everything. Otherwise, I cannot reassure you that greed will not consume me," Michael said in all honesty.

He could already tell that he was getting greedy for both treasure and strength. It was addictive to be wealthy and powerful, and Michael knew very well that the old temple could give him both unfathomable strength and treasures that were so valuable that their price couldn't be measured!

Thus, Michael wanted his brother to bombard him with the threats and dangers of the Primedival Pyramid and shake him hard, jostling him to reality and put him back in place.

If Danny wouldn't help him, he could always ask Alice. However, he didn't want to tell her too much about his territory just yet. He was still not certain what she planned to do with him, and what her future plans were.

It might be ungrateful to think like that about Alice Zenovia after everything she did for him, but Michael couldn't help but doubt her intentions. He was extremely vigilant, but who could hold him accountable for that? Since when were prodigious children of a highly influential family nice to him?

There had to be a reason for her interest in him!

After Michael told Danny about everything he encountered since he entered the Origin Expanse, he hoped that his brother could give him a helping hand.

That was exactly what Danny did. He was still shocked about the information Michael shared with him, but he could tell that his brother still had some sanity left though he was worried about his changing mindset and greed.

Michael might have been in danger when he emerged in the Untamed Jungle, and when he summoned their first ancestor as his first summon, but he overcame everything more or less easily.

Michael also gained a lot in less than a month, and he was about to advance to the 1st Tier. The speed at which Michael improved was dangerously fast. It was dangerous because he was more likely to overestimate himself sooner or later, which would lead to mistakes...and mistakes led to death in the Origin Expanse!

Danny didn't want his brother to die, so he went against the promise he made to himself and shared his hardships of the past few years with Michael.

He told Michael about how he started out as Lord, and how he struggled to stay alive. Danny shared how his territory had nearly been bulldozed by a rivaling Lord, and how he survived by himself. He

explained in detail what he had to do to overcome the ordeals in the desert region, and how he regained his power.

At last, Danny explained in detail the dangers of the Primedival Pyramid, and that the treasures found in the Primedival Pyramid were incomparable to the dangers they encountered.

Danny found Tigerfang in the Primedival Pyramid, but he had to pay a hefty price for it as in exchange for procuring it, thousands of his subjects died. One of the Lords in their expedition alliance died as well!

It was shocking.

The more Michael heard about the expedition the more he worried about his brother's safety. Michael forgot about raiding the old jungle temple almost immediately. Without the necessary preparations, the only thing he would receive by entering the temple was death...and he didn't want to die yet.

After a while, Michael felt like his head was on the verge of bursting apart. He pointed at the piece of paper and looked straight into his brother's eyes.

"Can you understand what it says? Even if it's just a glimpse, it would help a lot." Michael asked at last.

He had to make ample preparations before he could even consider entering the temple. Learning the spoken and written language used by the old temple was a necessity.

Michael had not yet processed everything his brother shared with him, but he was interested in the strange information the temple had given him. It attracted his attention, no matter how dangerous the temple may be.

Knowing how nosy his brother was, Danny could only surrender. He knew that he had scared Michael enough with the information he shared about his own life. It was obvious that the Curse of their family played a big role in the obstacles that appeared in their path, but the brothers could also tell that their curse might as well be a blessing if exploited thoroughly.

The old temple was an opportunity for Michael. It was a means to become stronger and be prepared for the war in the extra-terrestrial that might start at any time.

Danny felt that sharing his knowledge was the best way to prepare Michael for the dangers he would face in the future. Thus, he took a second glance at the piece of paper.

He spent the next ten minutes trying to decipher the sentences written down on the paper before he gave up. Instead of translating the entire sentence, Danny focused on translating single words.

"I know a bit of the Old tongue used in the Origin Expanse...but even then, I only know one word for sure," Danny acknowledged with a deep frown. He pointed at one letter on the paper and added, "That means 'forgotten'."

"But the other parts...they don't really look familiar. I learned the Old Tongue from a 5-Star Scholar of the Decalta Empire for years...but even then, I don't know these letters. I am certain that these letters are older than the Old Tongue from the Third Epoch. The Decalta Empire used the Old Tongue, and the Origin Tongue was created one millennia later, using the Old Tongue as its foundation..."

After Danny spent a whole hour staring blankly at the paper, he felt a bad headache creeping up his brain.

"This could mean 'Pyramid'...but I am not sure. This old temple of yours is WAY older than the Primedival Pyramid I'm trying to raid. That also means it could be much more difficult. The Forgotten Civilizations of the Old Age were very technologically advanced. They might have ceased to exist due to various reasons but don't underestimate them!!" Danny warned Michael while rubbing his forehead in pain.

Michael looked at the letter Danny pointed at. It was two letters after the word 'forgotten'.

"Pyramid might as well mean 'Temple' since the old temple is clearly not a Pyramid," Michael mumbled before he felt enlightened all of a sudden, "If that means forgotten and the letter after it means Temple, it's likely that they form the words 'Temple of the Forgotten' or something along those lines!"

Michael could tell that he was getting a little ahead of himself, but Danny nodded his head.

"Temple of the Forgotten?... That could be true, but I'm not too sure about that..."

Other than those two words, Danny had no idea what the remaining letters could mean. They looked beautiful and it seemed like an expert calligrapher had written them no matter how one looked at it. However, they might as well be paintings or idle scribbling without any meaning.

However, it was a fact that the language used by the old temple was far older than the Old Tongue of the Third Epoch!

This worried Danny a lot. Michael had yet to learn more about the tasks and responsibilities as the Lord of his territory, yet he was thrown into one troublesome situation after another.

That was not good.

He took a deep breath and chose to give Michael a general understanding of expeditions and important tips that made the preparations for an expedition, and the expedition itself, much easier.

"Pay attention to what I'm going to say now," Danny said seriously.

Michael's ears perked up and he did as told.

"The most important thing you have to do is to understand that your life is more important than anything else. You can find countless treasures and seek more golden opportunities, but you have only one life!"

"First, even before you consider starting an expedition, you must find out more about the ruins you want to explore. In your case, you have to learn the language, find out from what Era it belongs, and the general technological standard of that era. Then, you..."

In the next hour, Danny taught Michael the ABC of an expedition.

Michael listened intently and sat like an obedient kid in front of Danny, glad that he asked his brother about tips and tricks.

Chapter 93 Tier-1

After filling their stomachs to the brim and talking for hours the brothers went their own separate ways once again.

Michael was impatient to return to the Origin Expanse. He wanted to advance to Tier-1.

Danny stayed in the Central Trading Hall for some time while Michael hailed a shuttle to return home. Once inside the apartment, Michael willed the War Rune to form the Runic Gate to take him back to the Origin Expanse.

Back in the Origin Expanse, Michael told Tiara and the others that he would focus on advancing to Tier-1 and that he shouldn't be bothered if there is nothing important.

After that, he isolated himself inside his room.

He sat down on the bed cross-legged and closed his eyes. Michael focused on the pulsating War Rune on the back of his right hand. He didn't divert his focus and entered the depth of his consciousness not long after.

A source of light appeared in his inner eye. Michael could see a pillar of light in the center of his consciousness, surrounded by several wisps of light and both the Symbol of Extraction, and the Symbol of Eagle Eyes.

Dimly lit streams of light were sucked toward the pillar of light from all directions, which made it seem as if the pillar of light was branching out in all directions, reaching every single nerve and cell inside Michael's body.

After Michael focused on the state of his entire body, he was able to see that his entire body was faintly lit up. Michael knew that his entire body was filled with energy but he had never seen this state from the inside. So far, he had only felt it.

The state of being able to see inside his body was called introspection. It allowed him to see the energy invigorating his body, his Soultraits, the Artifacts revolving around his War Rune, and the pillar of light – which was what the War Rune looked like from within.

Michael took a deep breath now that he was able to see what happened inside his body. He focused on the streams of energy that were sucked inside the pillar of light and used his willpower to accelerate the flow of energy.

From one moment to the next the faint stream of energy turned into a thundering flood.

This phenomenon occurred to the streams of energy all around the pillar of light, which began to pulsate strongly.

The pillar of light that had been restricted through an invisible barrier slowly expanded.

The sound of crackling glass rang through Michael's entire being. It grew louder with every second and turned into a thunderous explosion as the pillar of light broke through the invisible barrier.

Soothing warmth and unfathomable power swept through Michael in the next instance. Simultaneously, dazzling light filled his senses, forcing Michael to escape.

His dark eyes shot wide open, and he began to gasp for air. His body felt extremely warm the next instant, but it was not soothing at all. No, on the contrary, it was a burning heat that spread through the deepest parts of his body as if he was on fire.

The burning heat first emerged inside his heart. Michael felt as if his heart would melt on the spot, and he could barely endure the pain and not scream his lungs out. His fingernails cut deep in the soft flesh of his palms, while he grit his teeth as the searing hot warmth began to spread through his blood vessels.

At first, Michael was worried. He was getting increasingly restless, only to recall that every Awakened would undergo a natural cleansing upon advancing to the next Tier.

Michael had learned that natural cleansing was miraculous and that it allowed Lords and Awakened to become much stronger, but why did nobody ever tell him that it would be this painful?

Was his body actually filled with rubbish?

Michael couldn't have imagined that the human body was that filthy and overflowing with impurities. Understanding this was enough to clench his fists even tighter and endure the natural cleansing.

As long as his first natural cleansing was successful and completed smoothly his overall strength would increase drastically.

Michael accepted the searing heat that spread through his blood vessels and let it do its work. Once it had spread evenly across the blood vessels all over Michael's body, the searing heat started to push itself outward.

The pores all over Michael's body opened and the first dots of black mass appeared on his body. The impurities smelled the worst, but that was given.

Time seemed to slow down as the impurities inside his body were pushed outward and soon layers of the badly reeking black mass covered his body from head to toe.

They engulfed his body like a second layer of skin, hiding the golden glowing human skin beneath.

Only the faintly golden glowing streams in his hands were a bit visible.

Michael was not sure how long it had been, but he got an idea as his body was being cooked by the searing heat that spread through him.

If it was possible to use Extraction on the Summoning Crystals to extract some Impurities, why shouldn't the same be possible on his body?

His pores were already opened and the searing heat spreading through his body loosened some of the impurities that were deeply embedded after having accumulated over the years.

By using Extraction to extract more impurities, Michael didn't harm his body. On the contrary, he used Extraction to enhance the effect of his first body cleansing.

It was dangerous because Michael had never done something like that, but he didn't want to waste the severe pain that spread from his pinky toe up to the last strand of hair on his head. It was uncomfortable and hurt either way, so Michael felt that it couldn't get much worse.

He ended up focusing on extracting more impurities from the inside of his body to further strengthen himself. The fewer impurities he left inside his body the faster his energy circulation and the higher the enhancement provided through the War Rune.

A body void of impurities would be the best. His strength would increase by a few times, and he would be able to achieve things that were unthinkable right now.

However, Extraction was only a 3-Star Soultrait. It was not strong enough to extract all impurities inside his body. The first body cleansing removed some impurities within him, but it was not omnipotent either.

Attaining a perfect body was not feasible.

It was said to be impossible.

But was that really the case?

Chapter 94 Invaders

Michael was not sure how much time had passed when he woke up.

It was bright outside, and his room was filled with a horrible stench.

A deep frown was etched on his face and he nearly vomited on the spot after smelling the stench of his own impurities, but he managed to wave his hand and spread out some energy to engulf the black masses of impurities that he stored inside his War Rune's storage space just a moment later.

Michael could remove the impurities later and burn them. However, for now, he had to wash up and change his clothes as the stench was too overbearing and his body felt icky.

He walked to the other side of the room where a wooden basin filled with water was waiting for him. Michael removed his clothes and stepped into the basin. He scrubbed himself thoroughly to get rid of the bad stench and put on a different set of clothes after he dried his body.

His gaze moved out of the window of his room and a faint smile formed on his lips.

He had finally done it. He advanced to Tier-1!!

The faint smile on Michael's lips turned brighter and pride filled his entire being. Outside the Origin Expanse, not even a full month had passed since he became a Lord, yet he was already a Tier-1 Lord.

He was not a rookie anymore according to the standards of ordinary Awakened even though he was barely 18 years old. It felt great!

But just as he was busy daydreaming and enjoying himself in the bright sunlight that shone through the canopy of trees, Michael noticed something that attracted his attention.

His bright smile disappeared, and confusion replaced it.

"Smoke? The campfire shouldn't be over there...a fire?!" Michael mumbled quietly to himself.

At that moment bright flames suddenly flared up, swallowing a large portion of the dense thicket bordering the clearing of his territory.

Something, or rather someone, engulfed in flames emerged from within the thicket. The being engulfed in flames took a step or two closer to the clearing of the territory before it fell over and collapsed on the ground. It stopped moving the next moment.

However, Michael's eyes widened further in shock as sharp pain pierced his chest at that moment.

A Link of Loyalty was severed when the being engulfed in flames stopped moving.

"W-wait..." Michael's voice cracked when he felt the Link of Loyalty being cut.

He noticed something he hadn't been able to feel before. His body was already sore and numb from the natural cleansing and the strengthening of the War Rune. This made it much harder to feel that something had been amiss all along.

'More than...50 Links of Loyalty disappeared!' Michael realized at last, and terror spread through his veins.

In the next moment, another Link of Loyalty burst and disappeared forever.

"My people are dying!!"

Michael was shocked. He had no idea what was going on, but he could tell that his subjects were dying miserably.

The pain and emotions reaching him, hitting him like an avalanche even after the Links of Loyalty had been severed were terrifying. They caused his hair to stand up on its end, and he felt something he hadn't felt in a while- fear/!!

Michael hurriedly rushed out of the room while putting on the last piece of clothing.

He had yet to test the limits of his power after advancing to Tier-1, but that was not important. He manifested the Boots of Taran and channeled enough energy inside them to activate the Swiftiness enchantment's highest level instantly.

Michael's body turned into a flash when he kicked his feet off the ground. His speed was terrifying, and he crossed the clearing near instantly.

Just as he was about to jump into the thicket of the Untamed Jungle to find out what was going on, Michael found Blaire.

Someone was standing next to Blaire as they ran through the thicket to enter the clearing. They headed to the center of the clearing and stopped when they saw Michael.

'Lilica Balrean? What is the leader of the EmeraldLeaf Adventurer team doing here?'

The moment Michael saw the familiar face of the Elven woman, his danger senses tingled.

Something was definitely wrong!

He rushed over to Blaire and Lilica Balrean, who looked at him with concern and fear.

"My Lord, before you attack her or anything like that, please listen to me!" Blaire shouted loudly as she ran over to Michael.

'Attack her? Why would I do that?'

Michael furrowed his eyebrows, but he didn't say anything. Instead, he motioned Blaire to keep talking.

"It's only because of this Elf that we're not yet dead!" She shouted, which caused Michael to sigh in frustration.

"Just tell me what is going on here. I just finished advancing to Tier-1, and I have no idea what happened while I advanced. Why is the Untamed Jungle on fire, and why are my people dying out there?!?"

By now, more than 50 Starless Summons and five Warriors had died, and Michael felt that the number would increase soon. He didn't want to waste anymore time talking to Blaire or Lilica, but there had to be a reason the leader of the EmeraldLeaf Adventurer Team appeared here all of a sudden.

The fire and Lilica's arrival at the same time shouldn't have been a coincidence.

Lilica looked at the back of his right hand with a trace of astonishment but regained her composure in the next second.

"Long story short, one of my teammates was in a bar, drinking enough to turn himself into a blithering idiot. Apparently, he told one of his Lionheart friends about your territory. The Lionheart told one of his people about your territory and news spread...so that's why a group of Lionhearts attacked you; they want your territory," Lilica explained hurriedly.

Michael nodded his head in response and turned in the direction of the fire. He ignored Lilica and rushed off.

The Tier-2 Elven Adventurer followed closely behind. She looked at Michael and expected a face filled with anger and wrath. However, there was none of that. Michael's face was only filled with determination to safeguard his territory and people.

"The Lionhearts attacking you are not natives from Xiltru, and their leader can only claim your territory as his own by using the item called 'Lord Seal'. It is extremely hard to procure and can usually only be acquired by true powerhouses of the Origin Expanse!" Lilica added quickly.

Afterward, she didn't say much. She looked at Michael, who ignored her and sighed deeply.

"I hope you won't hate the EmeraldLeaf Adventurer team. We never wanted to tell anyone about your territory," She said quietly as they came closer to the smoke and the commotion of the battle.

Michael eyed Lilica for a second or two. The leader of the Adventurer team seemed to grow more impatient the closer they came to the battlefield.

"I know that you won't help me fight the Lionhearts. You can just leave," He said emotionlessly.

Michael felt no hard emotions toward Lilica or the EmeraldLeaf Adventurer team. He had never expected them to keep his existence a secret and had already anticipated a similar scenario.

It just happened when they were not prepared, and he had been busy with other tasks. Though the timing was the worst, that was not something Michael could have prevented.

Lilica nodded her head faintly. She felt guilty because it was their fault that Michael was in his current predicament. However, she and her team couldn't afford to face the Lionhearts. They didn't want to offend the powerhouse backing them.

However, her guilt made her warn Blaire and the others half a day before the Lionhearts arrived. She only waited for Michael to alert him about the danger before hurriedly leaving.

Michael figured that the Elves had their own problems, but he didn't care about that.

It was not important who attacked him, or what kind of powerhouse supported them. Even if the Lionhearts were citizens from Xiltru, what did it matter? They attacked his territory and killed his people. The only thing they deserved was death!

The reason they attacked him instead of other Lords inside the Zentika Empire was likely to be the Untamed Jungle or to make sure that the Zentika Empire couldn't influence the Lionhearts' actions once they took over his territory.

That was Michael's guess given the few pieces of information he had.

It was quite troublesome, but Michael didn't spend his time worrying about the ifs and buts.

He was trying to keep his calm and suppress the uncontrollable anger that made his blood boil.

After all, only by keeping his calm would he be able to kill all those who were daring enough to invade his territory and kill his people!!

Chapter 95 Lionhearts

The pungent smell of burned flesh invaded his nostrils as he got closer to the source of commotion, and smoke entered his eyes.

Screams of terror and desperation filled the air, and the sound of metal clashing against metal rang through his ears.

Michael grit his teeth at the sight of the half-burned corpses of his people that entered his sight the moment he came close to the thicket that separated him from the terror of the battlefield.

For the first time, Michael's subjects were dying. It was not comparable to the time he had killed Fenrir. On the contrary, Michael's heart felt like a searing hot needle was stabbing it again and again while his head grew heavier the more people died.

His mind was a mess and he regretted being too late to protect everyone. He had failed to save those who he had sworn to protect.

However, Michael knew that he could protect those who were still alive. Maybe, he was too late to rescue those who had died valiantly, but he wouldn't allow the Lionhearts to keep killing his people.

Lionhearts had a human-like physique with Lion heads. Fur grew all over their body, and they were innately born with fire affinity. It didn't even require a Soultrait to awaken before they could manifest flames out of thin air and control them.

Their innate fire affinity turned them into a dangerous race. They were ferocious and far more threatening than Gogis.

Despite that, Michael's subjects fought the Lionhearts with all their might.

'Why did nobody wake me up when they arrived?' He wondered while rushing ahead. Lilica said that she warned the others half a day ago. Didn't that mean his people had been aware of the Lionhearts' planned attack for a while?

'Only if they had told me about it sooner...!' Michael thought, but his mind turned blank the next instance.

He knew why his subjects didn't wake him up. He was fully aware, but he couldn't accept it in his heart.

If the advancement of a War Rune was interrupted, the War Rune could have been damaged permanently. Even if his War Rune advanced properly, the moment Michael stopped his natural cleansing mid-way, he would lose the chance to cleanse his body and grow stronger.

Stopping a natural cleansing mid-way was comparable to crippling your talent, and combat prowess.

His subjects had known about this, which is why they chose to sacrifice their own lives rather than seeing their Lord crippled or injured.

Michael felt as if someone was choking him tightly. He wanted to blame his subjects for being stubborn, but he couldn't.

More than 50 subjects had sacrificed their lives to protect him and to make sure that he could advance to Tier-1 and complete the natural cleansing properly.

It frustrated Michael, but it made sense. In their eyes, their lives were not as important as the safety of their Lord.

Michael grit his teeth and forced his eyes to look away from the corpses. He passed through the thicket and emerged on the other side.

What appeared in his view were more burned corpses amid a burning forest. Everything was on the brink of destruction as all lives engulfed in the sea of flames were annihilated, reduced to embers.

Michael's gaze hardened and he retrieved the Hardwood Bow and a bunch of arrows as he stepped ahead.

The trees around him creaked loudly as if they screamed in pain, and he found Kelia not long after trying to use the moisture in the air and surrounding to contain the blazing flames and isolate them.

Her clothes were drenched in sweat while she gave her utmost to prevent the fire from spreading further and burning down everything, they'd worked tirelessly to build in the last few weeks.

Meanwhile, the Warriors, Knights, and Tiara fought valiantly at the front. Tiara's body was soaked in blood, and some of her hair had been burned, but she didn't seem to notice that. Her eyes seemed freezing cold while the silver spear lashed mercilessly at her opponents. She moved in one direction and thrust her spear in the other direction.

Then, suddenly, her direction would change. She would pierce the tip of the silver spear deeper in her opponent, twist the blade inside the body, and pull it out with tremendous force. Warm blood would splatter on her like a fountain, but it was almost like Tiara didn't notice anything.

It was as if her entire being was focused on the battle and nothing else mattered. Her presence was terrifying, and too overbearing for her opponents to endure.

The Lionhearts were frightened at the sight of the bloodthirsty woman of the Silverfang Tigerfolk. They retreated instinctively and tried to hide themselves and their path by manifesting firewalls between themselves and Tiara.

However, Tiara jumped through the wall of fire, unafraid of the aftermath. She pierced the silver spear through the head of the closest Lionheart and started to growl.

Her burning hair seemed to grow longer and Tiara's body arched forward. Her upper body leaned forward, nearly touching the ground before she shot forward with terrific acceleration the moment her feet kicked from the ground.

Michael was stupefied for a moment when he saw Tiara. He regained his senses in the next second, upon realizing that Tiara was fighting desperately, using everything at her disposal to gain an advantage to kill.

If that allowed her to defeat just one more opponent without any more casualties, she was more than willing to act recklessly. No matter how injured she was as long as her heart continued to beat so she wouldn't die!

While Tiara looked like a Berserker who had lost her reasoning, the ordinary Summons who had come to her aid were shuddering. More than a hundred Starless Summons wielding spears in their trembling hands were faced with five Lionhearts.

Five opponents may not seem like much, but the Lionhearts were Mid Tier-1 Adventurers with the ability to manifest fireballs and throw them at their opponents.

The Starless Summons didn't have any combat experience. They knew the theory and had trained for the worst case, but it was the first time they were faced with enemies who attacked mercilessly and were thrown into an actual battle.

A third of their combat force had already fallen victim to the searing hot flames of the Lionhearts, and more would soon follow. However, they couldn't give up and let the Lionhearts in so easily. If they were to give way and surrender, their Lord would die.

After spending weeks with their Lord – who was far more hard-working than his subjects, kinder than everyone they had known in the past, and sincerely trying to improve his subjects' living conditions in every possible way –, they couldn't allow any enemy to get too close to him.

If they had to sacrifice their lives to protect their Lord, so be it!

With that in mind, the scared Starless Summons mustered their courage to face the incoming fireballs head-on.

The fireballs soared through the air and it felt like time slowed down as they fell down like meteorites on the hapless subjects.

However, just before the fireballs could impact, star stripes of various colors soared through the air.

Multiple explosions rang through the battlefield as the fireballs exploded, yet none of the Starless Summons sustained any injuries.

At most, they were assaulted by a gust of hot air that swept through them, nearly knocking them off their feet.

Following the explosion, screams of pain left the mouth of the first Lionheart, just for the next to follow suit.

After the third started to whimper pitifully, the first of them slumped to the ground, an arrow stuck deep in his chest, another in his throat and a third in his eye.

The Starless Summons were startled to see this. Their charge slowed down as the Lionhearts slumped to the ground limply as one arrow after another struck their vital spots. The arrows were much faster than the bolts released by the Aero Crossbowmen, forget about the arrows the Archers shot.

Almost everyone turned their head to the Archer who released one arrow after another in quick succession.

A moment later, loud cheers rang throughout the entire battlefield.

"The Lord returned!"

"Our Lord finished advancing!!"

"Comrades, let's charge!!!!"

"For our Lord!!"

"FOR OUR LOORDD!!!"

Michael felt a rush of adrenaline course through him at the sight of his loyal subjects chanting his name. He wasn't sure how he deserved such loyal and trusted subjects, but it made him happy.

Simultaneously, the deaths of his loyal subjects saddened him. The thought of his subjects dying for his sake caused more energy to enter the Hardwood Bow that began to creak loudly.

It had already reached its limit and its pulling force couldn't be further increased.

However, Michael didn't pay any attention to the limit of his Bow Artifact.

He swiftly pulled the bowstring back after he nocked an arrow on it and shot. It looked like he didn't aim at all, yet his arrows hit the designated target without fail.

One arrow per second.

One kill every five seconds.

The number of Tier-1 Adventurers dying at his hands increased swiftly.

Michael was not sure how many Lionhearts attacked his territory and his people, but he knew that he wouldn't allow anyone to escape his wrath.

Their fate was sealed the moment they started slaughtering his subjects.

He killed five Mid Tier-1 Lionhearts in the first minute he joined the battle.

His power as Tier-1 Lord and his strengthened Eagle Eyes allowed him to unleash enough force to turn the Hardwood Bow into a lethal weapon with rapid fire.

But Michael was not yet done fighting. The five Lionhearts facing the Starless Summons were just the beginning.

This was where it all started.

It was time to counterattack and make them pay dearly for their mistake!

Chapter 96 An Eye For An Eye

The fire affinity of the Lionhearts was terrifying. Flames that could melt steel in the blink of an eye were enough to burn down the nature around them.

Michael was getting increasingly worried about the safety of his subjects. Most of them had never fought a life-and-death battle before, and even the veterans had never fought against an enemy with an elemental affinity.

'Calm down! You have a Water Elemental Mage. She has an environmental advantage and can extinguish the flames with the moisture in the surroundings...calm down!!!' Michael shouted at himself, and he would have slapped his cheeks hard if not for the Bow and Arrow in his hands.

Now that the five Lionhearts fighting the Starless Summons had been killed, Michael retrieved the Return Arrow. He nocked it on the bowstring and turned to the remaining Lionhearts.

Only slightly over 20 Lionhearts were still alive, and half of them were occupied with controlling the sea of flames around them. They wanted to burn the jungle in their vicinity and obliterate Michael's territory simultaneously.

"Prepare to throw your spears!" Michael ordered calmly.

The Starless Summons, whose hearts were beating wildly, followed his order immediately. They changed their stances in the next second, and they were ready to throw their spears the moment Michael gave them the go ahead.

"Shoot at the count of three," He announced in a voice barely loud enough for his Starless Summons to hear.

"1"

Michael channeled energy into the Hardwood Bow and pulled the bowstring back.

"2"

The bowstring reached the corner of his lip and Michael adjusted the Hardwood Bow's angle. The Starless Summons pulled their spears backward and put some distance between each other to make space for acceleration.

"3!"

Everyone moved in unison. The Starless Summons took three steps forward and released the spear simultaneously with all their might.

In the next moment, one hundred arrows flew in a beautiful arc.

Michael released the Return Arrow when the spears had already crossed half the distance to their target.

Their targets were the Lionhearts, which were busy reducing the beautiful landscape to ash and smoke. They noticed the movement of the inexperienced Starless Summons and controlled the sea of flames around them precisely to continue wreaking havoc.

One moment, the sea of flames burned down the Untamed Jungle, and in the next moment, the flames formed a huge firewall in front of the 12 Lionhearts.

Most spears were made from sturdy wood – extracted by Michael. They incinerated and turned into ash the moment they touched the searing hot flames. Meanwhile, the spears they'd collected from the Gogi Warriors lost most of their velocity upon piercing through the firewall.

The Starless Summons grunted in displeasure. They had just lost their only weapons, without gaining anything out of it.

What was their Lord even thinking?

Some of them doubted Michael's choice when they saw the flames flare up and devour their spears.

Yet, before the wall of fire could disintegrate, the pained shrieks and surprised screams of a Lionheart reached the ears of the Starless Summons. Their ears perked up and they looked at each other in confusion.

Their confusion didn't abate for the next ten seconds even though several loud twangs rang through the battlefield.

The twangs' source was the Hardwood Bow that was used repetitively with the Return Arrow which he had released four times in ten seconds.

His first shot pierced the nearest Lionhearts' chest. The Lionheart let out a guttural scream and died miserably. The Return Arrow returned to Michael barely two seconds after he released the shot.

Michael's right hand was already in position, swiftly nocking the Return Arrow on the bowstring before he pulled back in a smooth motion.

Then the second arrow was released.

He may not be able to see anything through the wall of fire, but the same could be said about the other Lionhearts. Unfortunately, they had failed to pinpoint his position before manifesting the firewall and had been busy destroying the landscape. Michael, on the other hand, did that using his Eagle Eyes and decent memories.

He knew exactly where the Lionhearts were positioned, giving him the advantage he needed to use the cover of the firewall against them. That was because the Return Arrow was neither incinerated nor the arrow's velocity slowed down drastically despite flying straight into the flames.

The Lionhearts had to block the downpour of more than a hundred spears. Thus, the firewall was wide and huge. Because it was so wide and huge, the firewall wasn't thick enough to slow down the Return Arrow.

Michael abused this fact to release the Return Arrow more than ten times in half a minute with the strongest pulling force the Hardwood Bow could endure – even if it was just barely.

The Hardwood Bow was on the verge of breaking apart, but Michael ignored that. He continued to use the Hardwood Bow even after the huge firewall finally crumbled.

Six Lionhearts were lying on the ground, unmoving. Meanwhile, two of the remaining six Lionhearts, whom Michael and the Starless Summons had aimed at, were injured lethally.

The six Lionhearts couldn't maintain the huge and wide firewall anymore. They dispersed most flames into the surrounding area to burn down the Untamed Jungle. Meanwhile, the remaining flames swirled around them.

The remaining Lionhearts waited for the opportunity to strike and fire back. However, Michael didn't want to give them the opportunity.

He returned the Return Arrow to his War Rune and retrieved a bunch of hardened arrows. They were enough to pierce the scales of Late Tier-1 Lizards.

Michael nocked the first on the bowstring before he released it. He didn't aim precisely because he knew what was going to happen next.

The Lionheart, whom Michael targeted with the arrow, released a small fireball to encounter the arrow. The two projectiles collided, and the fireball exploded, burning half of the arrow.

But since Michael had expected this, he had already nocked a second arrow. The bowstring was pulled back as well and he released the second arrow.

Not wasting any time, Michael nocked a third arrow on the bowstring. He didn't even follow the trajectory of the second arrow, knowing that another fireball would follow soon after.

The situation only changed after the third arrow was released. Michael aimed a quarter of a second longer before he released the arrow.

It shot through the air in a beautiful arc and approached the Lionhearts rapidly. However, the Lionhearts didn't think too much about the incoming threat.

One of them waved his hand nonchalantly to conjure a fireball in front of him. The fireball was small and didn't consume much energy, but it was strong enough to destroy the incoming arrow.

It was at the moment when he was about to release the fireball that something around him changed. The atmosphere felt weird, and he felt oddly uncomfortable. The other Lionhearts felt the same.

In the next instance, a water bullet pierced through the fireball, which exploded right in front of him.

A moment later, the arrow pierced through the Lionheart's throat.

The Starless Summons cheered loudly, while the remaining Lionhearts were dumbfounded.

Even the Lionhearts that were busy dealing with Tiara and the other Warriors noticed that something was wrong. Now that the firewall was no longer blocking their vision, they saw the corpses of their comrades and were shocked.

However, the sudden change of events was not yet over. Kelia was not the only one who changed her targets all of a sudden.

The Aero Crossbowmen and the Archers had also pulled away from the battlefield in which Tiara and the Warriors were busy fighting with their lives on the line.

They switched their targets and rushed to aid Michael and released their arrows and bolts to put more pressure on the Lionhearts that were supposed to control the crowd of hundreds of enemies.

The arrows and bolts released by the long-range combat unit weren't extremely strong or threatening. They were merely released by Low or Mid stage Tier-0 Archers and Aero Crossbowmen. However, the lethality behind the arrows was not the most important.

The most important was that they distracted the Lionhearts from the crucial incoming attacks. Kelia's water bullets cut through the air, piercing the lethal wounds of the two injured Lionhearts cleanly while the others were busy fending off the arrows.

Meanwhile, Michael's Return Arrow returned back into his hand. He and the long-range units spend the next two minutes bombarding the Lionhearts with more arrows, killing every single one of them.

Mercy was the last thing Michael would grant the invaders of his territory.

He didn't care who they were, or how strong they were supposed to be. Fact was that they were his enemies and that they had to be killed.

An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.

'You killed my people, so I will tear all of you apart!!'

Chapter 97 Lionheart Leader

Michael's plan had worked out much better than expected. The Lionhearts facing the Starless Summons were dead, and so was the group of 12 Lionhearts that had been focused on the destruction of the Untamed Jungle and his territory.

However, the fight was not yet over. On the contrary, it had just begun!

While fighting the other Lionhearts, Michael sensed two more Links of Loyalty getting cut. Two of his strongest Warriors died, igniting the blazing hatred deep inside Michael.

He wished that he was faster and stronger even though he had just advanced to the 1st Tier. Unfortunately, becoming stronger was not something he could achieve with a snap of his finger and wishful thinking.

It required time and effort.

Facing a group of slightly more than 40 Lionhearts was not easy for him, or his subjects. The Lionhearts were Tier-1 Adventurers with innate fire affinity, owned Artifacts to enhance their strength externally, and a Soultrait that may or may not increase their combat prowess even further.

The first dozen Lionhearts hadn't been much of a problem to deal with, but Michael could tell that the situation was different on Tiara's end.

Only eight Lionhearts were left on the battlefield, but none of them was below Mid Tier-1. The Lionhearts' Leader was a Peak Tier-1 Adventurer with several powerful Artifacts, strong fire affinity, and a combat-related Soultrait.

Michael was not sure what the Soultrait of the Lionheart Leader was but he noticed that one of his Warriors fighting the Lionheart Leader collapsed to the ground suddenly. Through the Eagle Eyes, Michael could see that only the white in the Warrior's eyes was left.

It was almost as if an impact on his head caused him to lose consciousness.

A second after the Warrior struck the ground, blazing flames engulfed him. No scream escaped the unconscious Warrior's lips, but his body reacted instinctively to the searing hot flames that burned his skin and the flesh beneath his armor within seconds.

The Warrior twitched violently but that was all he could do.

The smell of burned flesh entered Michael's nose and his eyes turned bloodshot at the sight of the burning Warrior. In the next moment, the Hardwood Bow creaked loudly. Cracks formed on the bow frame as Michael's grip tightened around the Hardwood Bow, almost turning his knuckles white.

In the next moment, the Hardwood Bow and the Return Arrow turned into white wisps that shot back inside the War Rune. Simultaneously, Tigerfang manifested in his hand as he dashed forward.

Michael turned into a cannonball the moment he strode forward. Kelia Tan waved her wand and manifested a wall of water in front of Michael. He ran through it and felt the water wall embracing him like a second skin.

The water cooled down his skin and mind, allowing him to regain his senses. Michael's gaze drifted to the burning Warrior. Kelia had already acted, extinguishing the flames engulfing the Warrior.

His skin was charred, and his flesh was exposed but he was still breathing, even if it was just faintly. A fellow Warrior shot toward his comrade. He removed the lid of the vial containing a potion he held in his left hand and poured down the content into the mouth of his injured comrade.

Afterward, he charged at the Lionheart Leader. However, the Leader didn't pay much attention to the Warrior. He looked at the Warrior only for a moment, but that was enough.

The young Warrior lost consciousness and slumped to the ground the next second. Only the white in his eyes could be seen.

Flames conjured around the young Warrior, but they dispersed in all directions when several arrows, bolts, and a water bullet approached the Lionheart Leader rapidly.

A small shield of flames was conjured around the Lionheart Leader at once, blocking the projectiles easily.

However, what the Lionheart Leader didn't expect to see was a human approaching him rapidly.

Until now, only the woman of the Tigerfolk had been fast and powerful. She was the only Tier-1 enemy he had faced. It was a shame because the fights until now had been boring for him.

Thankfully, that was about to change.

Michael's upper body leaned forward, nearly touching the ground as he appeared next to the Lionheart Leader. He found a small gap beneath the small fire shield and used it to appear right next to the Lionheart Leader.

The Leader wasn't vigilant, and Michael intended to use this arrogance against him. He wanted to kill the Lionheart Leader with a single strike.

However, before he could swing Tigerfang, Michael felt the Lionheart Leader's eyes pierce through him. The moment the Lionheart Leader laid his eyes on Michael, he felt as if something heavy lashed out at him. It felt like someone was whipping him...just that his mind was getting whipped.

The whip was extremely powerful, and it nearly knocked Michael out after a single lash. His sight blurred and his movements turned sluggish.

The next thing Michael recalled were blazing flames swirling around him, and a shortsword cleaving down at him.

Despite feeling like his head was mush, Michael forced his body to move. He dived to the side and rolled over the ground to jump up quickly and evade the attack.

The Lionheart Leader wanted to dash behind him, but a volley of arrows and bolts restrained his advance. Only the blazing flames continued their pursuit of his target.

This gave him a second to clear his head and focus on the surroundings. The next second, Michael jumped up from the ground and slashed into the flames. He cut them and backed off a little.

He saw Tiara from the corner of his eye, fighting another Lionheart whose sword and boots were shrouded in a white aura. The Lionheart was nearly as strong as their Leader being at the Late stage of the 1st Tier. His fire affinity was also powerful, just like the Leader's flames. However, his Soultrait didn't seem to be that powerful.

'Artifact Enhancement?' Michael wondered for a moment before he was pulled back to reality. The Lionheart Leader appeared in front of him with whips of flames circulating around him. However, instead of whipping Michael's body with the flame whips, his mind was whipped once again.

Michael's sight blurred once again and blood began to ooze out of his nose, but he planted his feet firmly on the ground. He used every bit of willpower to not succumb to the pain tormenting his head.

'A Mind Whip? Is that his Soultrait? What a fucking scam...' Michael cursed in his mind as he wiped his bloody nose.

He clenched his fists and grasped Tigerfang tightly. Staring at the Lionheart Leader, whose mane had been ignited, Michael felt an indomitable threat towering above him.

His mind told him to retreat and tire out the Lionheart Leader with the help of his people. They were at a numerical advantage and could slowly wear down the Leader.

However, that meant his people would have to continue sacrificing their lives.

Michael didn't want that to happen.

He couldn't allow his subjects to die while he was still standing strong.

He had yet to be injured physically!

Seeing that Michael was still standing straight, the Lionheart Leader dashed forward.

The Leader's speed was terrifying. He left behind trails of flames on the ground and appeared in front of Michael in an instant, cleaving down with his shortsword.

However, as the Lionheart Leader cleaved down, the situation all over the battlefield changed at once.

It was almost as if the Lionheart Leader's attack was a sign.

The corner of Michael's lip curled upward.

'Thank you very much for your patronage, you fucking idiot!'

Then he closed his eyes.

Chapter 98 Battle Tactics

Several explosions rang through his surroundings while Michael's eyes were closed.

The Lionheart Leader roared furiously and continued to cleave downward. However, Michael had already moved to the side by then.

His eyes were still closed but he was in a much better condition than the remaining eight Lionhearts. The Archers and Aero Crossbowmen released one projectile each as the Lionheart Leader cleaved down at him.

But their projectiles were not ordinary as a small glass vial was attached to the tip of their projectiles. The glass vials were the vial flashbangs, which Michael had used once when he was on the run from the EmeraldLeaf Adventurer Team. He hadn't used the flashbangs since then. At last, he found an exceptional use for them, blinding the eight remaining Lionhearts at once.

The Lionhearts were dazzled, and their Leader missed Michael by a hair's breadth. The next moment it used its Soultrait and fire whips to lash out at Michael. Little did the Lionheart Leader know that Michael was not in his range anymore.

Michael had changed his target suddenly.

Instead of fighting the Lionheart Leader alone, Michael abandoned the Leader.

The remaining Warriors charged at the Lionheart Leader to stall for time. Simultaneously, the Starless Summons picked up the spears that survived the firewall, and the weapons of both their fallen comrades and the dead Lionhearts. They smeared highly potent venom on the blades and charged at the remaining six Lionhearts.

Even if it meant that they had to die, the Starless Summons wouldn't allow anyone to completely destroy what they had painstakingly worked for since their resurrection.

Michael's territory could prosper with their sacrifice. Knowing that was enough for the Starless Summons.

The Lionhearts spent several seconds trying to regain their sight completely. They didn't expect several flashbangs to erupt amid the battlefield, confusing them for a while.

After all, there didn't seem to be any direct communication between the Starless Summons, Tiara, the Warriors, and their Lord. It was as if the Lord and his subjects were fighting without uttering a single word and just knew what had to be done.

What the Lionhearts didn't know was that Michael and his subjects had spent a great deal of time coming up with several strategies to fight powerful opponents long before the Lionhearts attacked them.

Michael and his people always knew that they would have to make use of their numerical advantage to overpower their enemies. They lived in a dangerous territory with Tier-1 Monsters being at the bottom

of the food chain. Nobody knew how long it would take until the Warriors and other combat units would advance to the 1st Tier.

After all, they had emerged from the Summoning Gate as Lowest Tierless Warriors. Whenever new Warriors emerged in his territory, they would be Tierless Warriors with the Lowest degree of refinement. All new Summons would be on the same level, even if Michael was to summon another Heroic Summon.

Thus, it was only obvious that Michael and his people used different tactics to make use of their advantages in order to even out the disadvantage of their low Tier and refinement degree.

The exploding flashbangs, followed up with a sudden change of strategy was one such tactic.

It required only the exchange of a signal and trust in the capabilities of their comrades-in-arms, otherwise, it wouldn't work out.

Fortunately, everyone believed in their friends and comrades.

The hundred Starless Summons charged at the six dazzled Lionhearts, while the Warriors, Knights in training, Archers, Aero Crossbowmen, and the Water Elemental Mage focused on the Lionheart Leader.

On the other hand, Michael appeared next to the second strongest Lionheart, whom Tiara had been fighting for a while now.

Ordering Tiara around was not possible in her current condition. She was filled with bloodthirst and would not stop fighting until she had killed her enemy. Her bestial instincts had taken control of her rational brain.

She wouldn't attack Michael thanks to their firm Link of Loyalty, but that was already it. Fortunately, Michael could make use of that.

If Tiara would not approach him, he could just go to her and help her defeat the second strongest Lionheart before they moved along.

The Swiftess enchantment of his Boots of Taran was fully unleashed, accelerating Michael's speed drastically. He was still a little bit slower than both Tiara and the Lionheart, but he could make up for it with his Eagle Eyes.

Being able to subtly gauge where Tiara and the Lionheart would move before they actually did allow Michael to imitate Lesser Foresight to a certain extent. He couldn't tell for sure where they moved but he could take a rough guess. Using these hints, Michael could react faster, which was everything he required to aid Tiara.

Tigerfang slashed through the flames enveloping the Lionheart. Tigerfang's razor-sharp blade was about to cut into the Lionheart's shoulder when a white aura suddenly enveloped the Lionheart's leather armor. Michael's attack was blocked as Tigerfang's blade cut less than a centimeter deep into the leather armor.

Michael frowned at this, but he didn't panic. He raised his leg and kicked the Lionheart with all his might. The Lionheart stumbled backward while Tigerfang was pulled out of the leather armor. Simultaneously, Tiara made her move.

She appeared beneath the Lionheart who was about to crash into the ground and pierced upward with the silver spear. The Lionheart reacted by blocking the attack with his longsword. Just as the silver spear was about to collide with the flat side of the Lionheart's sword, a burst of energy poured out of the silver spear. The silver spear's position changed by a few centimeters without slowing down at all.

The spear pierced shot past the longsword and pierced the Lionheart's chest. The Lionheart stared at Tiara in astonishment, but he regained his composure quickly.

The silver spear didn't cut deep through his leather armor. The white aura blocked the lethal force of the spear thrust.

He engulfed his body in blazing flames and willed them to shoot toward Tiara. The Battle Maid twisted the silver spear in the Lionheart's stomach before she pulled it back.

Her bracelet glowed faintly, manifesting the protection enchantment. A semi-transparent shield manifested in front of her. It broke in the next instance but that was enough time for Michael to appear behind the second-strongest Lionheart.

Michael inserted a tremendous amount of the energy churning within him inside Tigerfang and the Boots of Taran. He accelerated as quickly as possible and enhanced his means of attack as high as he could and slashed out.

The Lionheart noticed Michael's attack from behind himself the next moment. He twisted his body to avoid the worst injuries. However, Michael predicted his move and awaited the sea of flames that burst out of the Lionheart as he twisted his body.

He ignored the searing flames that burned his clothes and hair and kicked out with all his might. His kick connected a moment later with the Lionheart's kneecap, and the sound of breaking bones rang out next. However, neither Michael nor the Lionheart paid any attention to this.

Michael continued slashing Tigerfang across the Lionheart's throat, while the Lionheart was trying to block the attack with his longsword.

His longsword was about to move in between Michael and the Lionheart, but it suddenly stopped. It didn't move an inch.

Tiara's silver spear blocked the longsword's path.

Meanwhile, Tigerfang reached the Lionheart.

It slices through the Lionheart's neck at once, causing blood to burst out like a fountain.

The head of the second strongest Lionheart fell to the ground with a thud the next second.

They had finally defeated the Lionheart!

It was a moment of happiness, or it was supposed to be.

However, it was at this moment that Michael felt that more than ten Links of Loyalty had been cut.

That meant ten more of his loyal subjects had died.

It was not yet time to rest!

Chapter 99 Suicidal

Before the headless body of the second strongest Lionheart could touch the ground, Tiara dashed away.

The moment her feet kicked from the ground she turned into a cannonball. She appeared next to the Lionheart Leader and became the Vanguard while the others supported her from all directions.

Meanwhile, Michael moved in the direction of the six Lionhearts. Their flames shot through the rows of Starless Summons, burning their clothes and skin. The Starless Summons charged at the Lionhearts recklessly, unable to make use of any of their strategies due to the great impact the fire affinity had on them.

Michael shot through the flames with tremendous speed. The Boots of Taran had already caught fire, but Michael didn't care about that at this point. If his Artifacts would break and burn in today's fight, so be it! He would sacrifice all his wealth to save his beloved subjects.

He channeled more energy in the Boots of Taran to keep using the highest form of the Swiftiness enchantment. In the next moment, he was engulfed in the blazing flames of the six Lionhearts, betting his life on the water membrane created by Kelia Tan. The Water Elemental Mage in his team was powerful and Michael was certain that her aid was more than enough to defeat the six Lionhearts.

Tigerfang shimmered like the sea of stars in a cloudless night as Michael swung it. The thin longsword cut through the flames and inched closer to the neck of the closest Lionheart. The Lionhearts burst forth with more blazing flames. Their flames engulfed Michael, burning his Boots of Taran, clothes, and the hair beneath.

But that was already it. The Lionhearts' flames didn't come in contact with his skin yet thanks to the water membrane protecting him. However, it was only a matter of time before the water membrane would evaporate.

Michael's movements became even more agile and swift upon noticing that he was pressed on time. Tigerfang cut through the throat of the closest Lionheart, who had been fully focused on burning Michael alive.

The Lionheart didn't expect Michael to continue advancing through the flames like a suicidal maniac. This turned into the Lionheart's greatest pitfall and the reason he died miserably.

Michael felt the resistance of the Lionheart's flesh when he cut through his throat, but he didn't pay any attention to it. Instead, he appeared next to the second Lionheart and pierced through his eye. The blade dug deep into the Lionheart's brain. Michael twisted Tigerfang and pulled it out before he advanced to the third opponent.

He felt the searing heat engulfing him increase, however, he couldn't stop now – not when he was so close to eliminating the threat. Michael advanced and faced the third Lionheart in the sea of flames.

At this point, he realized that the water membrane had completely evaporated. The smell of his charred flesh stung his nostrils and his eyes hurt tremendously as they watered due to the heat. In fact, his entire body hurt like hell as he was on fire, every inch of his skin getting burned.

He endured the horrendous pain and grit his teeth, delivering the final blow to the third Lionheart swiftly. In the next instance, the sea of flames dispersed.

'Hmm?'

Michael knew that so far he had killed only half of the Lionhearts, who had been attacking his Starless Summons, so why would the sea of flames disperse suddenly?

Michael ignored the pain all over his body and looked at the three other Lionhearts. His eyes widened and he momentarily forgot about the pain he felt.

More than two dozen Starless Summons had surrounded the three Lionhearts, killing them by inflicting dozens of injuries that were – more or less – serious. But that was not what shocked Michael.

The two dozen Starless Summons looked no less than living torches. Their bodies were charred, and their Links of Loyalty were dangerously weak. If they had stayed engulfed in the blazing sea of flames for another second or two, they would burn to death.

Michael was already a Tier-1 Lord with strong external enhancements owed to his Artifacts. This allowed him to endure the sea of flames much better than his Starless Summons, which were not only without external enhancement from Artifacts but also Tierless and only at the Low and Mid refinement stages.

Michael's body moved instinctively. He accessed his War Rune and retrieved the strongest healing potions he had. He removed the lids and poured the content in the wide-open mouths of his trusted subjects.

"Don't fall asleep just yet!" He ordered in a tone that didn't allow disobedience.

His head turned to the other Starless Summons.

"Take care of the injured and treat them with potions. Don't give them more than one potion at once, otherwise, they might die from the sudden influx of too much life force. Only if they're dying even after you gave them one potion can you give them another one," Michael commanded in a steady voice.

"Don't let anyone die!!"

Michael shot up with these words.

He was also injured and growing increasingly tired. His body hadn't even been able to adjust to his War Rune advancing to the 1st Tier, and it was forced to accommodate the new power and the heavy toll of being injured simultaneously while fighting unexpected attackers.

But that didn't mean he could rest just yet.

Michael rushed over to Tiara and the others. He was certain that they would be fine now that Tiara was there, but Michael didn't want to postpone the end of the battle. He wanted to kill the Lionheart Leader and end this misery.

The Lionheart Leader noticed that he was all by himself when the Lord of the territory charged at him. He was already struggling to keep the bloodthirsty Tigress at bay, while the insects kept poking at his skin every now and then.

However, with the arrival of the Tier-1 Lord, the situation turned from bad to worse. Traces of panic appeared in his eyes, followed by confusion and anger at last.

He had killed enough enemies to provide the other Lionhearts with a tremendous advantage. Fighting a few hundred Tierless opponents shouldn't have been so difficult. They were not only Lionhearts, beings born to be powerful, but all of them were Tier-1 Adventurers with at least one Tier-1 Artifact.

It was impossible for the Tierless citizens of the territory to win against him. However, from the moment more than 150 Starless Summons chose to aid their Lord in the battle – knowing that they were likely to die – the tides of the battle changed.

"How...that Elven bastard...lied to us? Is that it? He said that...there was..." The Lionheart Leader couldn't control his emotions anymore.

The flames exuded by the strands of hair all over his body engulfed him suddenly and a fierce roar left his lips.

However, in the next moment, a silver spear pierced through the searing hot flames and blood spurted through the surroundings.

Following Tiara's spear thrust, several arrows and bolts coated by the highly potent paralysis poison impacted with a loud thud. Meanwhile, the blades of the remaining Warriors and the Knights in training found their way to the Lionheart Leader as well. They drove their blades deep into the flesh of the Lionheart Leader, ignoring the blazing flames engulfing their opponent.

More than a dozen arrows and bolts were already stuck in the Lionheart Leader's body, but he was still moving. At first, everyone thought that the Lionheart Leader was immune to the highly potent venom, or that the venom was burned when the arrows pierced through the flames before they impacted on the target.

But that was proven wrong as the Lionheart Leader began to stagger. At last, the Lionheart Leader began to struggle.

He was still in disbelief given the turn of events. A territory with less than 30 proper Warriors and only two beings at Tier-1 were able to defeat an adventurer team of more than 40 Tier-1 Lionhearts!! Their refinement degree at the first Tier was not even bad either, yet he and his team had lost – or were about to lose.

What was the reason?

Was it the Lord's impeccable archer skills, or was it the Silver Tigress' tremendous combat prowess?

The Lionheart Leader had no idea. He only knew that both had a great impact on changing the tide of the battle.

What the Lionheart Leader didn't realize was that they lost because they had grossly underestimated those who were weaker than them.

They didn't think highly of the Tierless Warriors, forget about the Starless Summons. In their eyes, they were weak and could be ignored. They were trash in their eyes, and it made them believe they could simply charge into the territory and bulldoze it.

However, what happened was that this so-called 'trash' outmaneuvered them by bravely entering the battlefield and heroically storming through their opponents – knowing deep down that they were likely to lose their lives. Underestimating an opponent who was willing to die for his ideals was a grave mistake. It was something only fools would do...or the dead.

The Lionhearts were fools and dead by now.

Realizing his grave mistake too late, the Lionheart Leader knew that he was about to die.

He didn't want to go down like this, but there was nothing he could do now to bring back his people.

With that in mind, he retrieved a fist-sized object from his War Rune.

In the next moment, the flames all over his body were absorbed by the metal object.

'Is that a bomb? Is he trying to take us with him?!?'

Chapter 100 The Price Of Winning

The moment the metal object resting in the Lionheart Leader's hands absorbed the flames all around, it began to tremble wildly.

Michael and the others first thought that it was a bomb, which had been set off for the worst-case scenario.

They were proven wrong quickly.

Tiara began to scream the moment the metal object began to shake blood began to ooze out of her ears. She collapsed to the ground the next moment.

'Sound? No, high frequency?' Michael asked himself when Tiara collapsed while the others were unaffected.

He reached Tiara and the others the next second and pierced Tigerfang through the Lionheart Leader's throat. Many questions flashed through Michael's mind, but he didn't want to give the Lionheart Leader a chance to outwit him again.

The Lionheart Leader was already under the influence of the highly potent paralysis venom but that didn't mean he couldn't retrieve a bomb from his War Rune. Michael didn't want any more of his subjects to die in this battle. The questions he had in mind were not worth sacrificing any more lives!

Seeing that Michael didn't want to keep the Lionheart Leader alive the others pierced their swords deeper into their enemy's body. More arrows, bolts, and water bullets pierced the Lionheart Leader, who couldn't endure the onslaught of attacks.

He collapsed after a few seconds.

Michael caught the metal object, threw it into the air, and slashed at it after inserting his remaining bits of energy into Tigerfang.

He split the metal object into two before it fell to the ground. It had stopped shaking. Simultaneously, the tension in Tiara's body was released. She had fallen unconscious but would wake up soon.

"You were lucky..." The voice of the Lionheart Leader rang through Michael's ears all of a sudden.

He thought that the Lionheart Leader was already dead, but that was not the case. The Lionheart Leader was just on the verge of death. He had a few more seconds left to live.

"It was just luck that this Elf-...." The Lionheart Leader spoke, but he couldn't finish his sentence as a razor-sharp blade pierced through his mouth.

Michael stared coldly at the Lionheart Leader, whose eyes widened in surprise.

"Who do you think you are to spout nonsense? Luck? Fuck off, who cares?! You don't deserve any last words. Nobody wants to hear them either way, bastard!" Michael snarled while staring at the Lionheart Leader whose eyes lost the spark in them. They turned dim and lifeless as he stopped moving altogether.

The Lionheart Leader died.

However, Michael didn't even bother to look at his corpse. This enemy didn't deserve his respect, forget about the honor of a glorious death.

Instead of paying attention to the dead bastards who invaded his territory, Michael rather focused on his people.

He rushed over to Tiara and placed her head on his lap. Michael was just about to retrieve a potion from his War Rune when he felt her twitch. Tiara opened her eyes weakly and stared straight into Michael's dark eyes.

"I...went out of control...I'm sor—...." She was about to apologize when Michael hurriedly placed a healing potion close to her lips. He nudged her gently to make her swallow the viscous liquid instead of talking. Michael didn't want to hear any nonsense from Tiara right now.

His mind was in a mess, and so was his body.

When the content of the glass vial was emptied, Michael helped Tiara up. He retrieved a few more potions, and handed Tiara a few before he drank a healing potion himself.

"Were you knocked out from a high-frequency signal?" Michael asked Tiara as his eyes roamed across the battlefield.

The flames conjured by the Lionhearts extinguished with their deaths, but there were still some small dying flames that were sputtering.

Kelia Tan used the last bits of strength inside her to extinguish them before she fainted. She had used too much of her energy in today's battle. However, that was the case for almost everyone. Everybody was utterly exhausted by now.

"I think he sent an emergency signal to someone. Usually, high-frequency signals don't knock me out... It was pretty strong. I think it was sent to someone far away," Tiara said while pressing one of her hands against her head.

Tiara looked like a big mess. Michael was not sure what aftereffect her bloodthirstiness had, or if it was somehow related to her Soultrait rather than her belonging to the Silverfang Tigerfolk, but he could tell that she was in a mess.

He patted her shoulder lightly.

"If the signal was sent to someone far away, it was probably sent to his backer. Either way, you should rest now. The others will take care of the injured," Michael said, pointing in the direction of the territory.

Dozens of people from the territory had already come over, tightly holding onto their axes and other tools. They had been unwilling to stay away from the battlefield and wanted to help out even though they had never held a weapon in their lives, much less taken a life. These citizens were artisans and workers, and they never had only ever picked a weapon to build something, not destroy or with the intention to hurt anyone.

Despite that, they came to aid their friends and colleagues. Their arrival was a little bit late as the battle was already over, but their timing was perfect to tend to the injured and take care of the battle's aftermath.

Blaire had rushed over to alert more civilians about the raging battle and ask them to help. That way, more than 200 people were now helping the injured.

Michael watched the scenery, his lips pressed together in a thin line. It was great to see the strong sense of unity between his subjects, and how they respected each other, but Michael couldn't get himself to smile.

He was worried.

'Did the signal go through, or not?'

That was the first thing Michael was worried about. However, even if the signal didn't go through, the powerhouse backing the Lionhearts would realize that something was amiss when he would not hear anything from the Lionheart Leader for weeks.

The Lionheart Leader was dead and couldn't report to his backer anymore. That would either signify that the Lionheart Leader forgot to report, he ignored his backer and abandoned him or her, or he died.

Neither of those paths provided a favorable result for Michael.

It was better to expect the worst right off the bat and expect more attacks in the coming few weeks.

'I need to get stronger...no...we need to get stronger, as fast as possible...'

The first thing that came to his mind when he thought about getting stronger was the Temple of the Forgotten.

But there were also other options.

However, before that, Michael helped everyone to clean up the battlefield, help to rescue as many injured subjects as possible and to bring the remains of the deceased to the clearing.

Only an hour passed while they did the rescue operations, but Michael felt increasingly tired. He stared at the remains of close to a hundred subjects that died in today's battle, and he grit his teeth tightly.

Most casualties were Starless Summons, who had been brave enough to join the battle, knowing that their survival rate would be close to nil.

They were the heroes of the territory, the reason why the territory was untouched and standing strong.

To other Lords, the death of close to a hundred Starless Summons wouldn't bother them too much. Their value was negligible in contrast to the gains made by defeating more than 40 Tier-1 Lionheart Adventurers.

But Michael didn't feel like that.

Today's battle may have been a victory, but it didn't feel like one, at all.