

Chapter 451 - The Emissary

With its recently attained momentum, Emissary Flesh was just about to victoriously leave Virus' range of aim when Virus also became serious and used his own unique trump card.

'Unnamed Virus Technique, First Form – Impulse!'

Quickly, an invisible chain fell off of Virus' frame as his machine gun was once again able to keep up with the struggling monster!

Ratatatatat~

SCREEEECH!

"Hahaha, I'm not letting you go no matter how hard you scream!" By now, anyone would've been able to perceive that the regrowing capabilities of the monster were chopped down several times as it was now much weaker in terms of healing. Moreover, the agonized yet helpless screeches of the monster emphasized that point even further.

In fact, the damage Virus' machine gun's normal mode was causing the monster was much lower compared to the harm a couple of exploding attacks would've dealt it.

However, through his experimented and proven theory, Virus was now confident that the potency of damage did not matter much, rather, what mattered was the nonstop bombardment which would gradually make it exhausted until it could not regenerate itself anymore!

And in order to accomplish that particular purpose, Virus couldn't utilize his longsword nor the handgun since Emissary Flesh would be able to restore itself and bring its healing ability to its peak condition in the short intervals between those very attacks! What he required were even faster strikes!

And thus, Virus determined the only weapon in his arsenal that could maintain lightning-fast attacks was in fact the machine gun alone!

The intensifying warfare proceeded as the shrunken Emissary jumped around while Virus maintained his aim at the opponent while staying in the 'Impulse' state.

As a matter of fact, the Emissary even pounced in Virus' direction from time to time, trying to bump into him using all its weight to crush and suffocate him beneath itself.

Fortunately, taking advantage of his 'Impulse', Virus could change positions at the drop of a hat and avoid the possible catastrophe!

However, as time passed, while Virus' energy was getting weaker and weaker, the Emissary in fact continued to get more powerful despite its weakening regeneration trait.

That was because the Emissary's strength had nothing to do with cultivation or energy since the logic behind the functionality of its power seemed to be time alone. The more the battle persisted, the stronger it would get!

Slowly but surely, due to the gradual accumulation of fatigue, beads of sweat began to roll down Virus' forehead. 'Ah, it's gotten too strong, although I can feel it's almost at the ending points of its healing capacity, it will exceed my aiming speed in a few seconds at most!'

Ratatatatat~

And indeed, just as Virus had predicted, in no more than five seconds, the Emissary triumphantly surpassed Virus' aiming speed as it roared in joy!

Screech!

After an exclamation of happiness, the monster was about to leave Virus' aiming position in the dust when abruptly, Virus connected to his ring and commanded.

'Normal mode – Follow!'

Immediately, the bullets seemed to have grown eyes as they followed closely after the beast that had just left the direct aiming point of Virus' gun!

"Hahaha!" Once again, much to the disappointment of the monster and the entertained burst of laughter from Virus, the combat was set in motion while the monster was getting closer and closer to its utter limits.

Screech!

Suddenly, as an act of final resort, the Emissary stopped trying to dodge entirely as it came to a complete halt before bristles began protruding from all over its meatball frame.

Next, as if it was a rock that had been thrown from the top of a mountain, the Emissary rolled in Virus' direction at its fastest speed so far to the point it almost seemed like the Emissary had blended with the fabric of space itself.

On the other side, as a result of that sudden burst of acceleration, Virus' eyes went wide open momentarily. Truthfully, in terms of speed, he had long fallen behind and he knew it!

Meanwhile, the rushing Emissary was feeling truly cheerful as it was confident Virus was already trapped in its grasp!

SCREEEEECH~

"Hahaha, don't be happy just yet!" Shouting out loud, Virus connected to the ring again. Internally, however, even he was slightly nervous as he wasn't quite sure whether his next strategy would work or not.

'Paralysis mode – Follow!'

Ratatatatat~

Immediately, a never-ending blue bullet light started making contact with the incoming Emissary as its accelerating speed was actually decelerated instead!

Meanwhile, seeing the opponent slowing down, Virus's expression was shimmering in joy while he pondered, 'Phew, thank me it worked!'

Honestly, considering how Virus had no data or knowledge regarding the anatomy and the inner workings of Emissary Flesh's body, Virus wasn't sure if the paralysis bullets would actually work on it.

In reality, his calculations had determined that due to the strangeness of this life form in front of him, the odds were that the paralysis bullet wouldn't have any effects on the beast as it might be naturally resistant against it. Furthermore, that may have been truly the case if the monster was still in peak condition.

However, having no other choice but to gamble and make the long shot, Virus had to take the bet quickly and try his luck since there was no room for hesitation at that point!

And apparently, lady luck was indeed on his side this time around.

After evading the rolling monster with a simple sidestep, Virus could hear the final growls of the Emissary as it seemed to have given up. No, it was more like the Emissary was completely drained as it was incapable of struggling anymore!

"Huh... is it over at last?"

In the meantime, the entire meatball physique of the Emissary started to tremble as if it was about to detonate anytime now.

However, just before it actually exploded, suddenly, a gigantic human-like mouth and an eye took shape on the Emissary's body as it left a vengeful vow behind while gazing with bloodshot eyes at Virus.

"Y-you've... made... a huge... mistake."

BOOOOOM!

Bits of truly dead flesh exploded in every direction, filling the interior of the cottage! At the same time, a brilliant light left the cottage as it disappeared off to somewhere unknown!

Following soon, the ancient sound was heard again.

"Hmm, you've accomplished something unheard of by defeating and killing off 'the sealed small skin that fell off from the nail of Emissary Flesh', therefore, you'll receive a substantial amount of tattoo smoke!"

Meanwhile, catching the slight hint of emotion within the previously static sound, Virus wondered in astonishment. 'Did the archaic voice just say 'hmm' in a surprised tone? Is it actually someone alive and not just a recorded sound of the past?'

'No, no, no... more important than that! Did the voice claim that what I just barely thrashed was merely a small skin from around the nail of true Emissary Flesh?' Only the thought of just what kind of terrifying being the true Emissary Flesh would be forced an unconscious gulp down his throat. 'I probably offended someone I shouldn't have.'

"Who is Emissary Flesh?" Virus didn't hesitate to inquire out loud. Now that he had offended the meatball anyway, he wanted to know as much as possible about this spine-chilling new enemy of his.

"..." Woefully, the ancient speaker refused to open their mouth.

"He's my enemy now, all thanks to your trials, so shouldn't you at least take some responsibility and clarify its identity and background?" Virus queried, trying to convince him using basic reasoning.

"Hmph, I don't need to explain shit to a weakling like you!" Annoyed, the archaic sound responded impatiently.

'Oh, right... this is the Cultivation Multiverse where the strong dictates the rules and logic.' Letting out a helpless sigh, Virus could only stop his interrogation as quietness descended upon the cottage.

Followed by the silence, smoke infiltrated into Virus' palm from every direction, making the Invisible Ancient Fortress World mark extremely distinct, far beyond anything it was before!

But none of that garnered Virus' attention to itself right now, instead, it was the tiny egg that was left in the spot where the skin of Emissary Flesh had exploded at.

Slowly walking beside the egg, Virus picked it up and began examining it with absolute focus.

The first course of action he took was to send his sense of awareness into the egg. Regretfully though, his awareness could not penetrate into the egg in order to see what was inside.

Punching it next, Virus tried shattering it apart, alas, even that didn't work as the egg was like a piece of unbreakable stone!

'Should I take this egg as a reward for killing that thing? Or is this perhaps something dangerous? Should I just throw it away? But what if it's something extremely precious! I mean I just probably killed something unkillable, even if it was just its skin.' While these contemplations were passing through Virus' head, like it was aware of Virus' current dilemma, the archaic sound explained.

"Even though it is not guaranteed, it could be a treasure, so either take it or leave it for me to take it." At this point, the voice was even less static.

Catching both hints of greed and trepidation in the tone, Virus finally made up his mind with a chuckle. "Hahaha, since when did I ever back down from this kind of possibly fun item? So whether it's a trap or treasure, I'll see it through with my own eyes and judge for myself!"

"Trial taker number eleven, you have passed the second floor, you shall be transported to the third floor and attempt the next trial, good luck."

'Ah, it became static and kind of robotic again.' After this notion went through Virus' head, another occupied it. 'But... as expected, even Origin couldn't absorb Emissary Flesh's energy.'

'Though I already anticipated that might happen since I finished it off indirectly using my machine gun and not with my own efforts. Moreover, I don't believe that thing even had energy, to begin with.' He analyzed calmly, awaiting the incoming trial.

In the following moment, Virus' figure disappeared automatically as he was teleported to the next floor, wherever that was.

...

Subsequently, Virus materialized in a dark corridor as a rotting odor hit his nose at once!

"Welcome to the third floor, the Underworld Maze of Infinity!"

"Trial taker number eleven, depending on your luck and the path you take, you may chance upon great treasures or deadly situations. In order to pass the trial, you need to reach the core of the world, the center of the maze. Good luck, you will need it!"

As the archaic sound was gone, Virus did a close inspection of his surroundings while deliberating, 'So I'm in an enormous maze construct this time. No, it said the Underworld Maze of Infinity, denoting it could be so big that it might rival the size of a small or big planet!'

'For now, let's check what lies ahead.' Pondering briefly, Virus ambled through the corridor. That went on until he reached a hall with three entrances!

"Which path should I take?" One entrance was green, the other yellow and the final one was in red.

Above the red door, Virus could read 'the greedy shall die' that was written in a strange language, yet oddly, he could comprehend it easily. Over the yellow door, the sentence was 'the average may survive' and on top of the green door he saw 'you shall survive.'

Virus promptly processed the information and figured out that if there wasn't any deception intended with the colors and the sentences, the green door should be the safest route but it will probably result in useless rewards as well. An easy door. Perhaps the trial will end immediately if he chose that gate.

The yellow entrance should be somewhat dangerous with normal encounters and items perhaps. A medium difficulty.

And the final entry was most likely extremely dangerous but definitely ensuing great rewards!

'Uhm, the green door is a 'no'. I wouldn't have entered this place if I wasn't even going to challenge myself.'

'The yellow door... that one's probably saying with some luck, even average cultivators may survive.'

'And the red gate is perhaps conveying that those who do overestimate themselves and get greedy will certainly die, but it doesn't say everyone will die... so, as long as you have the strength to back your confidence, there should be some chances of survival.' Already over with his internal monologue, Virus was resolved to go through the red entry.

That was mainly because nothing less than that was ever going to satisfy him and Virus knew that. As a result, between 'easy', 'medium', and 'hard', his choice was 'I either come hard, or I don't come at all'.

Subsequently, spreading his sense of awareness which covered some meters surrounding himself, Virus entered the red gate with no hesitation whatsoever!

However, the moment he pushed the gate open, an unexplained breeze rushed over, carrying a pungent smell with itself.

'Well, that's not alarming at all.' Smiling casually, Virus started sauntering forward.

'Huh?' Four minutes later, he was just beginning to wonder if the path was ever going to end, when out of nowhere, his eyes caught the sight of a scene that forced his eyelids to jump open in both shock and surprise.

That was because at the end of his eyesight, on both sides of the passage over the walls, he could see many skeletons hanging from chains and manacles against the walls!

However, what surprised Virus wasn't any of those skeletons, but rather it was the familiar yet somewhat unrecognizable corpse that had been gruesomely chained and manacled beside one of the skeleton rows!

'Wasn't that one of the two representatives from amongst the academician group? Just what could have occurred here for him to be killed and hanged like that?'

Immediately, alarms began to go off in Virus' mind as he became even more cautious with each step forward!

Furthermore, he understood now that the other participants were also all most likely somewhere on this maze floor at the moment which made this stage of the trial even riskier due to two reasons.

First of all, before seeing the corpse, Virus had assumed that he was alone in this maze and thus the trial was indubitably adjusted according to his cultivation level like the previous stages. Thus, now that he was proven otherwise, Virus knew the trial was going to be much more hazardous!

'That representative should've been in the Sublimity Emergence stage, but even he died right at the beginning of the red gate. Yeah, this place may have already proven itself to be much more perilous than I had anticipated before.'

Secondly, who could say what would happen if he came across other representatives? Human beings were always the most precarious beings in Virus' book.

But putting that matter aside temporarily, Virus focused on his surroundings for now. Something had murdered the dead body in front of him and it might just show up any passing seconds!

Time began to pass as one minute after another flew by, however, no matter how much vigilant Virus remained, nothing was at sight.

'Maybe the participants before me killed whatever that was occupying this path?' That line had just blinked through Virus' brain when out of nowhere, his hair stood on end and a chill went down his spine due to his sense of awareness detecting something standing right behind him quietly!

Chapter 452 - To Qualify!

Swish!

Brandishing his weapon backward with a swift spin, the longsword failed to hit anything as it moved unhindered! Whatever that was behind Virus before was gone as fast as it had shown up!

'What was that?' A deep sense of crisis was filling up Virus' heart. Whatever that had been standing behind him earlier had vanished so quickly that Virus couldn't even catch its shadow with his eyes.

It looked like the assaulter didn't desire for Virus to see even its silhouette, unbeknownst for the attacker though, Virus' sense of awareness had already depicted a complete image of whatever that had flickered in and out behind him.

In his mindscape, Virus shockingly visualized the creature as something that had the head of a male human, the body of a lion, and the tail of a scorpion!

Referring to his own sea of knowledge, the only creature he could resemble and connect what he was witnessing to was something of a legend!

To be accurate, it was a Persian mythical creature called the Manticore!

Truly dumbfounded, Virus pondered to himself, 'So something like that exists here...'

'Could it be just a resemblance or...' As this notion passed through his head, Virus once again gazed at the skeletons hanged on the wall.

Analyzing the shape and frame of all the bones, Virus noticed that all of them belonged to men only. Virus knew that pointed at the famous title of the Manticore called the 'Man-eater' as that was the literal meaning behind its name.

Furthermore, seeing how some of the bones only had some parts of them left with clear teeth marks left all over them, plus the flesh that was gone from most of the body parts of the freshly murdered representative, Virus realized that the Manticore was slowly savoring its food over the years. Virus immediately connected that to another legend which stated Manticores eat their prey whole, without leaving even bones behind!

'It's definitely a Manticore.'

'Maybe it's a certain type of evolution that's bound to happen at some point in various multiverses, something that might have happened at some point on Earth in the forgotten or buried past. Maybe it's some kind of alien race.'

Now that he had come across a Manticore, Virus knew he might be in deep trouble.

'Maybe I should run away?' Looking at the several recent footprints on the ground, Virus deduced that there had been others here as well, but they had run away without any delay, probably taking advantage of the time the Manticore was busy hunting the dead academician representative!

'So none of them dared to go against the Manticore, huh? Despite being in a large group.' Virus thought that was a pity. If they had grouped together, watching over one another's backs, they might have had a slight chance of killing the Manticore considering how strong all the representatives were.

'Well, it's not really strange though.' Recalling how the Manticore had silently emerged behind him much like a ghost, that in addition to its apparent startling speed, Virus couldn't really blame them.

'They must've been incapable of catching even a single view of their enemy, thus, they must've been scared out of their wits trying to escape as quickly as possible, thankfully though, they were in a group so the Manticore could only pick one prey.' Fully understanding just how much the humans feared the unknown, Virus thought their actions were justified.

'Ah, alas, I won't be able to escape since I'm alone. The manticore has already locked its fangs on me to-' Just as he had reached this point of his thinking process, a chill went down Virus' spine as he detected the creature silently standing behind him again!

Fwish!

Slashing backwardly, Virus yelled, "Stop doing that already, it's creepy! Come fight me head-on if you dare!"

Virus could guess that the beast truly enjoyed hunting male prey that was utterly frightened. That's why it was currently busy silently dashing behind him without attacking at all! It wanted to see that trace of fear within Virus' eyes.

In the meantime, Virus had just uttered that sentence when the creature was at his back again. However, having seen that merely standing behind him wasn't scaring the prey in any way, it decided to shallowly maul his back this time!

'Impulse!'

Whiz!

"Argh!" The beast was so fast that Virus could not even react even though he was in the state of super-fast processing of time freeze plus his 'impulse' together!

That was because although he was successful in detecting the beast the moment it showed up, there was still nothing he could do since his body simply could not spin and retaliate fast enough!

Regardless, even after sensing the burning sharp pain on his back, maintaining his calm, Virus didn't show any signs of fear over his face since he knew that was what it desired. 'How should I deal with this bastard? Right now it's merely teasing me using its paws, but the moment it discovers a hint of fear in me, it will get serious and do fatal attacks using both its paws and sharp scorpion tail to make mortal holes all over my body!'

'My speed and reaction aren't fast enough, thus it doesn't matter what kind of devastating attacks I have, they're all futile since I can't land them on the opponent.'

By now, Virus had inferred that the Manticore's level of cultivation was 'at least' at the mid-Third Order, which was something Virus was currently helpless against!

'What should I do?' Reactivating his time freeze perception, Virus began calculating and searching for any type of possibility of him living past this hurdle.

Regretfully though, he soon came to discern that he was completely helpless against this beast. After having considered the possibility of escaping, Virus could guarantee that was not possible as the beast would shred him to pieces the moment it saw him start running since that was also a sign of terror.

Moreover, Virus was aware that using his 'cultivation level' to land some kind of attack was also pointless since he wasn't swift enough to land his attacks on the beast in the first place.

He couldn't even create and use the second form of his Peak-Human class movement technique due to him still being stuck with five liberated pathways alone!

"I concede." Virus announced helplessly, awaiting the teleportation.

Unfortunately, no matter how long he awaited the teleportation, it didn't happen.

'Ah... so even conceding isn't possible in this floor, though I had already anticipated it seeing how the archaic being didn't talk about being able to concede... the only way to avoid this type of dangerous situation was perhaps by choosing the easier green and yellow routes.'

Aaargh!

Another graze manifested itself on the back of his body.

'How is it so fast?' Virus wondered to himself while unconsciously blaming his inadequate level of strength. He simply could not comprehend why the Manticore was so quick. It was so swift that if someone said it was teleporting instead of moving on its legs Virus would've at least considered the idea. That's how quick it was!

It didn't matter if he used the pitch-black scales and his 'Impulse' to add a bit of speed on himself, it was all futile compared to the Manticore's unbelievable speed!

'Damn it!' Frustrated internally, Virus examined his surroundings carefully. Of course, most of his attention was fixed on his back.

He wanted to at least closely examine the beast and recheck if there were any weaknesses he might have missed.

Therefore, when it appeared again, after a vain attempt in trying to evade the sharp claws, Virus concentrated his focus on the beast's movement and overall physique and began studying them carefully.

Unluckily, the result of his close examination was that he couldn't discover any apparent weak points on the sickening monster.

Of course, he had many strategies and tactics of dealing with it if only he was in a group, unfortunately, he was not, and defeating it alone was almost impossible without proper power to back it up!

Still, wanting to try the psychological card at least, Virus shouted in great annoyance. "You fucking bastard, face me head-on if you dare! I'll so fucking shred you into a thousand pieces! I dare you, bitch!"

Unfortunately, it didn't seem like the Manticore understood the language at all, instead, deeming his provocation as a sign of fear and giving in, the situation turned worse as it materialized behind him and actually darted its venomous scorpion tail right at Virus' heart!

Noticing that, in his own time-freeze perception, Virus' eyes went wide open as he realized his vain attempt had just backfired!

'There's simply no way to dodge out of the way.' Virus determined in a powerless manner. If everything proceeded as such, Virus was going to die soon.

However, utilizing his terrifying thinking ability, Virus immediately came up with a temporary method to at least defend against the incoming strike.

'Trigger Median Configuration – Fragmentary Integument!'

Instantaneously, the pitch-dark scales covered his shoulders nearly to the point of shielding his heart. But woefully, it was short by just a little bit.

'Impulse!'

However, Virus' goal wasn't to cover and shield his heart in that manner at all, instead, having already achieved his initial purpose, utilizing every bit of his speed he could muster, Virus moved his shoulder toward the attacking path of the tail.

Bam!

Promptly, the scorpion tail hit the dark scales as it was deflected away!

'Yes!' Succeeding in his defense, Virus now successfully bought himself some more time.

'This can't continue, now that it knows my little trick, I will die by the next ambush!' Already aware of the fact that he had reached the finishing points of the battle, Virus had to admit that was the end of the line for him unless there were some hidden cards he may have left hidden until now!

'Fucking hell! This is such a big waste! I didn't want to squander it on this type of opponent!' A thought only Virus himself understood took root in his brain.

Even though Virus' upcoming course of action felt like a huge mispend of resources on just a Manticore at the mere Third Order, having no other options left, Virus could only bear with it and let it go since the circumstances had now elevated to either 'do' or 'die' kind of situation!

So, the first measure Virus took was to deactivate his ring while freezing his perception of time.

Subsequently, already knowing where the monster was going to crop up and try to ambush, Virus raised and brought his palm to the back of his shoulder.

Afterward, while maintaining time-freeze, all he did was to patiently wait in that position for the predator to show up.

Seconds passed in real-time as an absolute silence descended upon the area. At first, it looked like the Manticore had come to be suspicious of Virus' weird pose.

Seeing that, however, Virus gradually began to walk toward the end of the corridor while preserving that odd stance of his. 'Just don't show up and let me go, that'll be for the best!'

Indeed, Virus was sincerely beseeching the Manticore to stay its hand.

Unfortunately, Virus' step-by-step amble forward decreased the Manticore's suspicion as it came to realize that Virus was merely taking an unusual pose to make him doubt so as to escape his grasp!

"Hihihihi!" For the first time since its hushed emergence, the Manticore started chuckling creepily as it materialized behind Virus' with no hesitation whatsoever!

Following that, it simultaneously mauled and shot its scorpion tail at Virus' most essential organ, his heart!

In this round, the Manticore was also extremely careful so it would be able to adjust the path of its tail in case Virus tried to block using its earlier dark scales.

Meanwhile, sensing the Manticore already at his back, Virus pondered disappointedly, 'Sigh, why did you have to make an appearance?'

Then, he no longer hesitated as the resolution to let go intensified in his heart.

'Impulse!' Arcs of Electricity surrounded Virus' frame at once!

'Trigger Initial Configuration – Longsword!' The longsword, 'the Darkest Night, the Shining Moon', materialized inside his already raised palm as its hilt automatically positioned itself to his grasp.

Despite the longsword now pointing toward the direction of the attacking Manticore, however, both Virus and the Manticore knew it simply could not reach the Manticore's figure in order to even have the slightest chance of harming it in any way!

That recognition in return forced an eerie grin of victory on the Manticore's human face as it pushed an even deadlier might behind its offense!

'Huh, you think this is all I can do?' Woefully for the Manticore, a devilish smirk found its way over Virus' lips as he triggered the subsequent plan of action he had prepared.

'Trigger Terminal Configuration – Regulated Self-Destruct!'

Instantaneously, from the sharp end of the longsword, the weapon began to disintegrate. However, the eye-catching point of this odd phenomenon was the fact that as the tip began to disintegrate, it also sparked into an extremely long beam of blue light that rushed at the Manticore with the guidance of Virus.

HH—MM!

Right away, as Virus waved his wrist downward, the beam effortlessly traversed through the flesh of the Manticore and even badly damaged the floor beneath it!

The following moment, as if a knife was just done cutting through soft butter, the two equally lifeless parts of the Manticore fell on the ground.

The Manticore was dead, as simple as that!

By now, the disintegration process had reached the end of Virus' longsword as it dissipated entirely!

Even his ring was nowhere to be seen.

'Sigh...' Letting out a helpless sigh, Virus looked at the finger that had been priorly equipped with the special ring that he had made years ago.

Due to the insufficient level of technology Virus had access to at the time, the ring he had created then was something he had devised and configured three forms overall.

The first configuration was called the 'Initial Configuration' which could transform the ring into several types of cold weapons and firearms plus a few other convenient features such as clothes and masks.

The second configuration Virus had added to it was called the 'Median Configuration' which solely had the feature of partially adding dark scales to Virus' limbs. He had named the dark scales 'Fragmentary Integument' which meant an outer layer of protection that covers only some parts of the body.

And the final configuration he had planned for the ring was titled the 'Terminal Configuration' that just had one utilization called the 'Regulated Self-Destruct' which as the name suggested would lead to a guided form of lethal self-destruction and termination which could in return deal an extremely concentrated form of damage!

However, truthfully, the last configuration was something Virus wanted to utilize only when he was against someone or something that was absolutely unbeatable in every way!

Even though Virus hoped to never come across such an opponent, being the calculative A.I. he was, he had planned the terminal configuration to be one of his last lines of defense when he eventually came face to face with such an opponent.

Nevertheless, the reason why Virus had been so hesitant to use the ring against the Manticore before wasn't that it was an irreplaceable piece of item that could not be created again.

No, in fact, now that Virus had left many worker robots on Virusia to develop it, he was certain that the next time he went there, he would be capable of developing and polishing a more overpowered ring with even more up to date and advanced configurations.

The cause of his hesitance mainly had to do with the fact that he was just at the beginning sections of the red gate and he was already forced to throw his trump card into the fray!

Furthermore, now that he was stuck on the Cultivation Earth for an unknown period of time, Virus was sure going forward, he will face many other desperate situations soon as horrible enemies would come knocking considering what his plans were for the upcoming future.

Phew~

'Let's just forget about it. It's a done-deal anyway and there's no point in crying over spilled milk.'

Shaking his head repeatedly, Virus was just about to briefly study his surroundings before moving on and heading deeper into the passage, when unexpectedly, from the carcass of the Manticore, a vast amount of energy stormed into his pathways!

'Huh? I thought Origin wouldn't absorb its energy since I killed it with the help of terminal configuration which is basically like a gun.' Touching his chin in contemplation, however, Virus soon figured out what was happening, 'No, if you really think about it, what I did was to extend the reach of my weapon, so I was in fact only using the longsword to kill the Manticore... and that qualifies for Origin's absorption!'

Chapter 453 - Dislike

76%... 88%... 100%!

Following quickly, the synthesis rate of Virus' sixth level of Liberation which had been previously stuck at seventy-five percent experienced an almost instantaneous rise to one hundred percent in one go!

'Ah, this amount of raw energy... was the Manticore perhaps in High- or Peak-Third Order? That's crazy.' The amount of energy that was currently rushing through his passages was so heavy Virus could say with confidence that the Manticore was obviously above the Mid-Third Order!

The moment it reached a hundred percent, his sixth pair of pathways also began to release itself to the world outside as now Virus had six liberated pathways!

Furthermore, Origin also transmitted another type of odd force which quickly untangled his final eighteenth single pathway!

Now Virus had all of his eighteen pathways completely clear with no blockages whatsoever!

Fundamentally, that implied Virus could in essence progress to the mythical Ninth Level of Liberation as long as he preserved through!

"Huh... so this is what it feels like to sense and have control over all eighteen of my passages... amazing." Raising his fist in front of his face, Virus gripped it tightly while muttering to himself in joy.

Earlier, since Virus did not have control nor could he feel all his passages, it was as if something was missing from his body. But now that all of them were under his dominance, Virus had the illusion of finally being able to enjoy the unobstructed movement of his energy within his pathways!

However, for some reason, although the energy was abundant in his pathways due to the extraordinary amount of energy from the Manticore, Virus still wasn't able to break through to the seventh level right away!

'Hmm, what's going on?'

Quickly focusing his awareness within his passages, precisely on the sixth pair, Virus tried to discover why the energy wasn't moving on to the fusion process of his thirteenth and fourteenth pathways.

To his bewilderment, Virus could see that the energy was abundant, and it was quivering so intensely as if it may even burst and explode his entire sixth fused pathway in case it didn't find an outlet to relieve itself. However, it still could not elevate itself to the next level.

'I feel like I'm missing something important.' That odd instinct was transmitting itself directly into Virus' heart as it gripped over him much like a craving one sometimes gets for a specific food but just can't figure out what food it is!

'What is lacking?' Immediately sitting on the floor cross-legged, Virus closed both his eyes as he sank into a meditative state.

'Let's try breaking through manually.' In fact, in all of his previous breakthroughs, all Virus was required to do was to kill strong opponents as the Origin would pump the necessary energy into him which would naturally result in him breaking through in the smoothest manner imaginable. It didn't require any guidance whatsoever as it happened by itself like it was the most natural process in the world.

But now, sitting cross-legged, Virus felt as if he had to comprehend something essential, a fact, or perhaps something else entirely before being able to breakthrough.

Hence, sitting down in that position, Virus' mind started overworking itself while he immersed in the sensation that was flickering within his heart right now.

One minute passed.

Five minutes...

Ten minutes...

Twenty minutes...

Even forty Minutes passed!

Ultimately, it was precisely in the forty-sixth minute when the fog that had been previously blinding Virus unveiled at once as the realization hit him while he murmured.

"The heavens 'embrace' the first path, they 'hospitably greet' the second path, they 'salute' the third path, they 'welcome' the fourth path, they 'receive' the fifth path, they 'accept' the sixth path, but the heavens 'dislike' the seventh path!"

"Hahaha, so that's why!" By heavens, even Virus himself wasn't quite sure what it or they were, perhaps they were the laws that brought existence itself together, or maybe they were something else altogether!

Virus didn't have knowledge regarding what exactly the heavens were, but seeing they apparently did not like the idea of him entering the seventh pathway and were even trying to slightly resist his progress coerced Virus to laugh in mirth and amusement!

Next, looking up, he yelled like a maniac, "I do not know what the heavens every cultivator talks about is nor do I care..."

"BUT! If you insist on interfering in my game of entertainment... well, WELCOME TO THE PLAY! Let's see who gets the final laugh! Hahahaha!" Simultaneously forcing his raging energy to the next level, Virus ripped the resistance apart as he broke through to the following level at once!

Seventh Level of Liberation!

At the same time, after Virus' little speech and the act of provocation, he could swear he sensed a slight tremor in the ground. But it was so minor that unless one had a terrifying level of perception like Virus, that person would not be capable of detecting it.

"That's all you can do? Hahaha..." With that Virus once again focused on the internal network of his physique as he observed the synthesis rate which was shooting through the roof right now!

15%... 32%... 46%...

57%... 69%... 87%!

Only when it hit eighty-seven percent fusion did all the raging synthetic force end completely as tranquility was once again restored to the passages!

'So beyond the sixth level is considered a taboo, huh... the so-called heavens prefer the cultivators to break through to Sublimity Emergence stage straight away when they are done fusing their sixth pathway, heck, they encourage it!'

'But above that, they start attempting to bar the path forward.'

Grinning from ear to ear at this point, Virus murmured, "The first taboo of Liberation, huh? Well, that only makes me want it more, such excitement coursing through my veins!"

'Hmm, but it took me more than forty minutes just to figure out my heart and realize the force that was trying to hinder me.' Although this notion went through Virus' mind, he somewhat understood why it had taken him so long to disclose the truth.

'I'm weak when it comes to the matters of the heart, perhaps my talent in that regard is even lower compared to a normal mortal human being.' Indeed, Virus was perfectly informed that the reason why it had taken him so long to shine some light on that nudge, that urge in his heart, was because he was poor in the heart due to him originally being an Artificial Intelligence, and he could discern it even more transparently after going through this particular experience.

'Subpar cultivators might've taken around forty minutes too in case they were a little poor in the matters of the heart, but that's 'their' forty minutes... my forty minutes is much more in terms of quality!' Indeed, although Virus hadn't gone to the point of time freeze when trying to come to terms with his heart just now, he had still employed a lot of his processing speed and perception of time.

Therefore, he was crystal clear his concentrated forty minutes was incomparable as it was on another realm altogether!

When it was about the matters of wisdom, intelligence, and mind, Virus was like a never-seen-before supernova that shined brighter than any other in existence! Unfortunately, when it was about the true tangible heart and not the artificial one, he was like a child that had just come to the age of learning to walk on four legs but refused to do so while even suppressing and even trying to control that chaotic new

urge inside him instead of just freeing the leash, letting it go wild, and thus allowing it to grow by itself!

To be more accurate, Virus needed to understand that the heart wasn't supposed to be forcefully managed by the mind since doing so would only stunt its growth. What he required was to stop forcefully interfering with his own heart and instead willingly immerse and delve into it by letting it go buck wild!

And that was exactly what was hindering his path to some degree today.

Consequently, if Virus did not improve this new part of himself, the slight impediment of today might turn into something much greater in the future when he came across more complex matters of cultivation that necessitated his heart!

Albeit, the mind opposed the heart in most cases as they were basically like oil and water that did not go well together.

Meanwhile, rising to his feet, Virus briefly inspected his surroundings before resolving himself to proceed on his path to the unknown.

Afterward, for nearly a few minutes, Virus kept ambling forward when he finally reached three doors again. Above the gates, only one sentence was engraved.

One path leads to the dead-end, another leads to the dead, and the last one leads to the end.

Reading the information, Virus could easily infer that the gate of 'dead end' most likely led nowhere as he would be forced to either return or be imprisoned there forever.

However, as to the gate of the dead, Virus assumed by dead they probably meant death.

And as for the final entry of the end, Virus determined that although it could mean death, it just might as well directly lead to the center of the maze and the end of the trial!

Unfortunately, it didn't matter how much he contemplated the interpretation of each saying since there was no way to discern which gate was which.

So, after some futile deliberation and discovering no hidden signs, Virus decided to randomly pick a door and hope for the best.

'The middle one, let's go!' Then, not bothering to even consider it further, pushing the gate open, he launched inside!

Briefly afterward, Virus chanced upon a corridor with a tiled floor where hundreds of thousands of square holes were cut into the surface of the walls everywhere.

Moreover, there were already many sharp arrows that had fallen to the ground.

'Hmm, so these are traps?' Wondering to himself, Virus was just about to take his next step, when abruptly, just as his footstep was several centimeters away from making contact with the ground, he paused.

'My awareness is telling me it's empty beneath this specific tile, it must be a trigger.' With that conclusion, one might assume he would avoid stepping on that particular tile, however, Virus did the opposite.

Swish! Swish! Fwish~...

Immediately, tens of arrows were triggered as they headed from all directions toward him. Fortunately, having expected the outcome, Virus had already retreated backward and easily eluded the arrows.

Picking one of the arrows after that, Virus quickly discerned that each arrow was probably submerged in some type of lethal poison, denoting the true danger of this arrow trap wasn't their sharp ends but the poison they've been doused with.

'Hmm, just as I thought... but looking at the other arrows and the fresh cuts on the walls, a few people must've passed this corridor already, it should be the representatives.' Regardless, now that he had determined the functionality of the traps, Virus began casually strolling through the path while his sense of awareness effortlessly unearthed the trap tiles as he smoothly kept away from them.

'Hmm, it may come in handy.' Picking one of the most heavily doused arrows on his way, Virus fastened it to his belt. He wasn't going to let go of any resources that could possibly be useful.

Soon, progressing past the trap field, Virus' passage was uninterrupted as he swiftly ran through while maintaining his spread awareness around himself.

After around five minutes of sprinting, he was once again facing a dilemma, a fork in the road to be exact. This time, however, there was no sign or even a sentence as he had to just pick one.

So, without further ado, Virus choose one by luck again and darted inside.

A short time later, as he was dashing through the corridor, Virus encountered walls and ceilings that were filled with rather gigantic holes in them. However, he didn't dilly-dally and proceeded forward!

He had no intentions of stopping as long as he wasn't attacked or his awareness notified him of something dangerous.

Unfortunately, he had merely taken some strides forward when he came across two familiar faces currently busy fighting a group of creatures that Virus could only describe as dire rats!

"Cheeky woman, Henna, you two need any extra hands?" In case it was any other representative Virus was encountering, he would've sprinted through them without even throwing them a single glance, however, considering how the cheeky veiled woman had kind of saved him earlier, he naturally wasn't going to ignore them.

Although Virus was completely indifferent to everything that was happening in the world unless it interested him in some way, there were also a few unique situations and cases where he wouldn't hesitate to act.

One such case was related to his foes, people that provoked or moved against him with malicious intentions. If he deemed them worthy enough, he would stop at nothing to pay them tenfold back at least! Even though it might not happen immediately for the sake of his pleasure and plan, it was inevitable at the end of the road.

Another situation was about his benefactors or those who had kind intentions. When it involved them, if he was truly capable, Virus would definitely make a move and repay them a hundred times. For instance, in case he found them in a quandary, danger, or in need of some assistance, he would not hold back.

And right now, seeing the two struggling against a large number of creatures, Virus wasn't going to just ignore and move on.

"Ah, it's Vee! Yes, we need h-" Spotting Virus, Henna wanted to ask for help cheerfully when the veiled woman beat her to it.

"Stop, hot face! I know you're trying to act tough and courageous in front of us since we're in a bit of danger, but I can't possibly bring myself to use a weakling like you as cannon fodder! My righteous heart does not allow it!"

That, however, popped some veins on Virus' forehead while his expression turned dark. "Huh... you're still as cheeky as ever."

Then, no longer lingering around, Virus stormed at the closest dire rat!

'Impulse!'

Barely perceivable lightning arcs flickered all over Virus's body as he punched its head.

Wham!

Like a ball without air, the dire rat's head caved in as it died at once.

Wham~

Whacking another rat to death, Virus immediately felt the lack of his longsword. Now that the ring was gone, he didn't have a weapon and that meant he couldn't even utilize his 'Twisting Tempest Thrust' technique which required a longsword. 'Ah, I miss my longsword.'

'Should I just start the process of creating a Peak-Human class fist technique?' Just as that idea was raised in his head, shaking it, Virus rejected the proposition. 'No, the fist techniques are less lethal at the end of the day. Furthermore, right now I'm in the process of decrypting and breaking down the movement-type techniques, so I don't really have the mental capacity for anything else at the moment.'

BAM!

'Hmm, should I just learn one of the fist techniques I have in my database? Hmm, nope.' Victoriously killing the third rat, Virus concluded that learning a fist technique right now was also kind of unnecessary since he had no issues with facing the dire rats, thus, he temporarily decided against doing that as well.

To the current Virus who was killing each dire rat with a single blow, utilizing a fist technique was a completely redundant endeavor that would do nothing but deplete his energy faster, therefore, unless necessary, he was against doing it.

What was more essential right now was to preserve his energy as much as possible since the number of rats was rather big.

As he proceeded to massacre the dire rats together with the other two ladies, Virus soon came to realize the obvious truth that his level of strength had experienced a sharp fall after losing the dark scales and the longsword.

Before, when he was at the sixth level of Liberation, Virus could nimbly fight and defeat the weaker Low-Third Order creatures easily, however, now that he had broken through to the seventh level, since he had lost the ring, he felt as if he was still at the same level as before and could at most fight and defeat the same Low-Third Order monsters.

He believed in case he was still in the sixth level of Liberation and the ring was gone, he would've been no longer capable of fighting Low-Third Order beasts at all and it was only because of the recent breakthrough that he barely succeeded in compensating and making up for the loss.

What that denoted was that Virus' capability in battling opponents several levels higher than him had fallen by an entire level. That's how significant the ring was to Virus.

After a while of intense battle, at last, all the monsters were dead as three panting figures were left standing surrounded by a lot of dire rat carcasses.

At the same time, focusing within himself, Virus noticed since the rats were not even in the Third Order, they had been totally helpless in affecting the synthesis rate of his seventh level in any major manner.

Meanwhile, taking a brief glimpse of Virus' countenance, the veiled woman admitted, "Wow, you're stronger than I thought you'd be, hot face... looks like you didn't even need my aid that day, huh, you're no damsel in distress, are you?"

To that claim of hers, however, Virus could only respond internally, 'Well, I wasn't really this strong prior to setting foot into the Invisible Ancient Fortress World, so...'

On the other side, now that she had a breather, an alarming realization hit the cheeky woman at last as she pointed her finger at Virus and started screaming dramatically.

"AH, WAIT! How the hell are you even here?"

Chapter 454 - It's Vee!

"AH, WAIT! How the hell are you even here?"

"Me? Well, I was lucky enough to pass the Bridge to Heaven." Exhibiting a half-smile, Virus vaguely responded.

"Wuh? That's impossible! You're shitting me, right? Lucky enough to pass it? What the hell do you take the Bridge to Heaven for, hot face? If it was something you can sweep through with luck alone, every rando would be here right now!"

Not desiring to explain more specifically, Virus changed the subject, "Anyhow, how could I catch up to you guys? I obviously entered the Invisible Fortress much later than you and you two are only here? Just how slow are you two?"

"Ah, actually... that's because of our bad luck, the first gate we tried was the dead end, so we had to waste hours returning to the three gates of dead-end, dead, and end." Henna was the one to reply instead this time. However, inspecting her expression, Virus could detect some hints of dissatisfaction over her face.

'Hmm, why is she not happy with me being here?'

Meanwhile, the upper cheeks area of the veiled woman's face suddenly flushed red as she angrily vocalized, "Damn it. We might have lagged too much behind compared to the others!"

"But... why are you guys in such a rush though?" Puzzled about the reason behind the cheeky woman's rush, Virus interrogated casually.

As a result of that, however, the two ladies gazed into each other's eyes for several seconds before the veiled woman seemed to have made a decision at last as she locked eyes with Virus and clarified the situation.

"Ah, well, being ahead of others here is always a boon since you'd be able to have a monopoly over others if you came across a valuable treasure. But to be honest, that's not the accurate cause behind our haste right now. We're all are in a hurry because we just noticed this round of the Invisible Ancient Fortress World is rather special."

"Special? Why is that?" Mystified by this odd set of circumstances, Virus demanded further elaboration.

With a rare glint of gravity in her eyes, the veiled woman untangled the affair more. "That's because thousands of years ago at one particular appearance of the Invisible Fortress, someone found an incredible treasure room, unfortunately, he was only capable of taking one item from that treasure room but even that item was so awesome that it made him one of the stronger cultivators of his time!"

"And?"

With one brow arcing upward, she answered. "And, at the time, since he wasn't ever going to be able to return, that person revealed where the treasure room was roughly located at."

"Hmm... so you guys already had the map of this maze of infinity prior to even entering the Invisible Ancient Fortress World?" Gently touching his chin, Virus assumed the possibility.

But to that assumption, the veiled lady only shook her head and denied, "No, not really. That's because every time the Invisible Fortress appears and the trial takers participate in the maze of infinity they are randomly thrown to a different corner. And the maze of infinity is so large that the chances of the trial takers being dispatched to the same location are almost zero! Therefore, it doesn't really matter whether you have a map or not since it's entirely a futile endeavor."

"All that particular cultivator revealed was a hint that will lead to the treasure room." Finally done with her brief account of the affair, the veiled lady went quiet.

Unfortunately, that attempt of illumination only forced Virus to be even more confused than before. "Huh? Then doesn't that mean you guys are aimlessly chasing ghosts? I mean you claim you don't have a map, and that each time the representatives of that era are sent to a different place, so what's the point of having a hint when you don't even know where you are?"

Together with a playful shove, the cheeky woman shed more light on the topic, "That would've been the case if we had not come across the three gates of red, yellow, and green."

"Other than the hint that leads to the treasure room, that cultivator also mentioned in a passing that in his journey to the Invisible Ancient Fortress World, he had come across three entries of red, yellow, and green and that he actually picked the red door!" Waving three of her fingers in front of Virus' eyes, the cheeky woman chuckled in some amusement.

Finally feeling as if the fog had melted away, Virus could easily connect all the dots together. "Hmm, I see, so the impossible did happen in this round of the trial of the infinity maze. Then, considering this piece of information to be general knowledge and seeing that the red gate leads you to the treasure room, all the other representatives must not have hesitated at all before picking the red one and began charging ahead as fast as they could, right?" Finally getting a clear picture of the entire situation, Virus concluded.

"Exactly! That's why we need to hurry! Let's go together!" With her lips pursed together, the cheeky lady pointed at the path ahead while urging them to move swiftly.

"I would rather go alone though." Virus denied without further ado. He was more inclined toward moving solo unless necessary.

"But... hot face, the other representatives might have teamed up as well, so going alone would only endanger your life and ours... we could be easily defeated if the others ganged upon us," A sorrowful glint seemed to fill the veiled lady's eyes at once as she continued sadly. "You're not going to let them gang up on us, right? Two frail ladies gang-raped and a strong man doing nothing but watch and let it happen... sob..."

"Sob... that turns you on, doesn't it, watching two fair ladies get gang-raped by other men." Accompanied by restless movements of her body, the veiled woman seemed to be in anguish while tears filled the corner of her eyes.

'Here we go again.' On the other side, veins were about to pop on Virus' forehead while he nearly saw blood before him. "I'll tag along, for now, so shut up."

In fact, even if it was just to pay back some of the favor, Virus would've still willingly collaborated with her. She just had to tell him their life will be endangered instead of all these insolent behaviors.

...

Afterward, the trio sprinted on the narrow corridor for a while until the corridor itself began to gradually expand. By the end of the expansion, it became a titanic yet long hall that continued as far as the eyes could perceive!

"Hmm, what will we face this time, I wonder?" Virus mumbled as they proceeded forward cautiously.

The more Virus studied his surroundings, the more suspicious he became. Right now, on both sides of the hall, a group of demonic faces was carved, and apparently, the number of demonic faces was at least in thousands.

Furthermore, beneath each demonic countenance, a single withered corpse that had been nailed to the wall could be spotted.

"Huh? Did another Manticore do this?" Virus whispered to himself.

"What's a Manticore?" The befuddled veiled woman questioned since that was a term she'd never heard or read about.

"That place right after the red gate when you guys left the academican representative behind and escaped by yourselves, there was a creature called Manticore there." Hands clasped behind his back, Virus said.

"Really? That sneaky bastard was a Manticore? We couldn't even see what it looked like, so we were so frightened that we all started running without even daring to check behind us. That creepy place was no joke, to be honest!"

Waving his fingers before the two, Virus revealed another truth. "Well, I don't think you two needed to run in the first place since you are both women, that creature only hunts men and probably didn't throw a single glance in your way."

Surprised by the fact, the veiled woman felt speechless. "Wuh? For real? So we were scared for nothing?"

"Yes." He confirmed harshly.

"But how do you know all that? And how did you know it was a Manticore? And how did you survive that above everything?" Feeling lost, the veiled lady asked. The more he was in her company, the more mysterious Virus became to her eyes. 'Who exactly are you, hot face?'

"Well, I figured it out somehow through sheer luck." Pulling his shoulders closer together, Virus replied in a laid-back manner.

"You're going with that luck bullshit again! Will you stop already? Just say I don't want to explain or something!" Tapping one foot on the hard floor, the veiled lady was feeling truly frustrated now.

"Well, whatever." He answered while acting even more easy-going than before.

"Y-you!" Running her hand through her silky hair, she was only speechless.

"B-but, is there a Manticore here as well?" Meanwhile, scanning her surroundings, Henna's figure was shivering slightly as she inquired.

"Hmm, to be truthful, I don't believe that is the case actually. Looking at the state of those corpses, they've all withered away while their flesh and bones remain on their body without much damage to them. A Manticore simply won't let the flesh of its prey rot away as it'll consume the meat while it's fresh. Only the bones will remain as it's the ration for a longer period of time."

"I see, but, hot face, you must be very hot in the brain as well since you seem to be knowledgeable about everything, so smart! I'm even more into you now." With her chin held high, the cheeky woman acted unusually smug as if she couldn't be more proud of herself for choosing such a wise person as her man of interest.

"Anyway, nothing's happened so far, so maybe there are no challenges in this hall, let's rush over." Henna stated, truly desiring to believe that herself.

Afterward, while staying absolutely vigilant, Virus and the other two ladies continued to tread forward.

In the meantime, without their notice, around three specific demonic faces, ancient runes began to quietly light up and shine.

Next, the runes seemed to have become alive as they started vibrating while three of the withered corpses also started shivering in sync!

On the other side, the party of three had only walked a few steps ahead when unexpectedly strange roars reached their ears.

That nearly forced the two ladies' hearts to jump right into their mouths as their eyes went wide open. Although they were both strong, apparently, after experiencing the trials so far, they had deemed this place to be too creepy for them.

Next, turning back, the trio caught the sight of three withered and rotten bodies currently striding toward them!

ROARR~ ROAR!

HHHHAAAAHHH~

"Ahhh, the withered corpses are moving!" The color seemed to have left Henna's face at once as she screamed in absolute trepidation while the image of the charging opponents reflected within her eyes.

"Defend and attack!" Totally composed, Virus didn't hesitate to storm at one of the withered corpses at once before throwing a punch at the closest target.

Wham!

Unfortunately, reaching out with its palm, the corpse easily stopped Virus' strike!

"Damn, they're pretty strong! At least at the mid-Third Order in terms of pure might." Analyzing and measuring the level of the corpse's strength, Virus surmised almost instantaneously.

Following quickly, the corpse opened its mouth wide, revealing oddly sharp teeth before pouncing toward him in an attempt to bite the flesh off his neck!

"Get the hell away from my hot face!" Right as the opponent was about to land on Virus' body and bite his neck off, energy started gathering and churning on the veiled woman's staff as she smashed the enemy savagely and sent it flying away.

"Who's your hot face! Also, stop addressing me as hot face, it's Vee!" Concurrently, Virus thought to himself. 'How can someone be so annoying in every type of situation imaginable? Such a weirdo. I'm more freaked out by you than this Invisible Fortress.'

At some distance from the two, the assaulted corpse rose to its feet almost immediately as it charged at them again.

Alas, the other two corpses were also upon the trio as well!

"That was one of the strongest attacks in my arsenal but it did absolutely nothing to it! In my opinion, we can't defeat them at all. They're also rather quick, if any of you have any brainstorm in regards to how to deal with them, now is the time to let it out!"

As three withered enemies finally arrived before them, each of them went against one moving corpse.

Boom! Bam! Wham!

"Argh!" While Virus and the cheeky one successfully blocked the incoming attack, Henna was sent flying away!

Her performance had experienced a sharp fall due to the shock of witnessing moving corpses. As a matter of fact, even in the Cultivation Earth, being attacked by corpses was a terrifying concept, especially to a woman that had not seen much of the world.

"Sister Henna!" The cheeky woman's eyelids jumped as her expression became unusually grim.. Obviously, she held Henna just too dearly as it broke her heart to see her get hurt.

Chapter 455 - That's It!

'We can't fight them all, what should we do?' While dodging out of the way after a simple block, Virus began examining his surroundings such as the wall the withered corpses were nailed at, the demonic faces, the ancient runes that were currently shining brightly, and even the enemy in front of him.

On the other side, the cheeky woman was defending Henna who had fainted due to the earlier assault.

After a simple calculation and analysis of the hardness of the decayed corpse, Virus could easily confirm that he would be incapable of damaging it even if his longsword was still intact.

'Hmm, let's see if there's any trick to this trial. I just have this foreboding hunch they're not meant to be defeated in a direct clash.' Entering his time-freeze perception, Virus' mind began to go through every little detail in the surroundings.

And as anticipated, after considering every small detail, it did not take long for him to come up with the possible methods of dealing with their opponents.

"Cheeky woman! Can you keep them busy for a moment? I have an idea that might work." Turning toward the veiled lady, Virus shouted.

"Huh? A moment? Sure, I have a method of keeping all three in check for a minute or two." Briefly feeling surprised by Virus' announcement, the veiled woman didn't hesitate to take out an unknown pill from her pocket as she swallowed it at once!

Immediately, her energy started to boil, increase, and become much more chaotic. Apparently, the pill had forcefully made her a level stronger compared to before, albeit temporarily.

Bam! Wham! Bam!

Afterward, swiftly maneuvering around, she attacked the three wilted opponents once each, which changed all of their targets from Virus and the incapacitated Henna to herself.

Amazingly, she was now fighting the three all by herself!

"I-I'll buy you exactly one minute. D-Do whatever you can in that duration!" Gnashing her teeth in pain, veins became visible around the veiled lady's eyes. Obviously, this was one of the side-effects of using the pill which was putting her body under a lot of pressure.

"Got it!" Sprinting toward the three demonic faces that had released the three dried-up corpses, Virus first examined the ring of ancient runes covering the demonic faces.

'Is this the source of their energy?' Pondering that, Virus quickly punched the engraved runes, trying to damage them in any way possible.

After checking the hall earlier, Virus had come to realize that only the ancient runes around these three demonic faces were lighted up. And these were precisely the demonic faces that had released the three shrunken enemies!

The rest of the wilted corpses remained motionless nailed to the walls of the hall while no ancient runes had turned on.

In Virus' opinion, there was no way for dead carcasses to start moving by themselves. Logically, after having died, they should stay dead and there's no way for them to start moving as if they were alive.

Or at least that would be the case unless an external force was controlling them like a puppet after attaching strings to them that could successfully make them the puppeteer's weapons of onslaughter.

Bam!

As his punch landed on one of the shining runes, regretfully, Virus understood although the wall behind it seemed to have been somewhat damaged, the runes themselves didn't seem to be harmed in any way as they continued shining like a ghost that cannot be touched.

'Hmm, could it be the runes are not the source?' As this notion flickered in his mind, Virus' pupils turned toward the demonic face at the center of the runes.

Boom!

Punching the demonic face once, a few cracks immediately became visible on it. At the same time, the runes trembled slightly.

"That's it!" Virus muttered while clenching his fist.

Grrrr!!!

"Ahhh! Hot face, one of them suddenly started ignoring me and is on its way to you!" The veiled lady's yell reached him at this time.

'Huh? So this demonic face must be the source of that fucking corpse.' Now that he confirmed the tactic that would successfully deal with the enemies in the hall, Virus rushed to end the fight before the incoming corpse could get to him.

Bang! Bang! Bam! Boom!

After continuously punching the demonic face four times in a row utilizing all his might, the demonic face victoriously broke into several pieces!

At the same time, like a puppet whose strings had been broken, the walking corpse that was just about to arrive behind Virus fell on the ground lifelessly!

Bam! Bam! Bam!...

Not knowing how much longer the veiled lady would be capable of indulging the disgusting dead bodies, Virus immediately changed his target to the next two demonic faces as he shattered them apart one by one!

One after another, two additional corpses fell on the floor, truly motionless this time!

Simultaneously, some smoke left the broken demonic faces as they joined the marks behind each of their palms.

"H-Hot face! You did it! They truly died this time! Hee... Haa..." Came the cheeky woman's cheerful scream. Sweat was drenching her clothes by now while she panted exhaustedly.

Just as Virus was about to respond, unexpectedly, his eyes fell on the subsequent six demonic faces that started shaking slightly as one rune after another began to light up around them.

Seeing this, a tremor went through Virus' heart as he knew the situation was going to get much worse in case they stayed any longer in this cursed place, thus, sprinting toward the veiled lady, he shouted.

"We need to get the fuck out of here before the next round of withered corpses starts walking! Grab Henna and let's run!"

Subsequently, after the cheeky woman's nod, together with the unconscious Henna, they mustered every ounce of strength in their body as they dashed to the end of the hall before vanishing from it!

"Phew..." After leaving the terrifying hall, both the veiled lady and Virus let out relieved sighs at the same time.

That, however, attracted their gazes into one another soon.

And after a brief few seconds of locking eyes, they both fell into a burst of uncontrollable laughter.

"Hahaha..."

"Hehehe..."

"That was a close one, hot face." The cheeky lady declared while maintaining eye contact with Virus' attractive eyes.

Alas, Virus shattered their special moment apart by urging her next, "Yeah, wake her up though, we should continue."

"Okay..."

...

Sometime later, as she woke Henna up, the trio proceeded on their path through the maze of infinity.

While on the way, they encountered several traps. For instance, once, they came across a really narrow corridor where Henna mistakenly stepped on a trap trigger which resulted in a pit opening up beneath their feet.

Luckily, Virus had been vigilant the entire time as he grabbed both their arms and jumped forward using all his might just as the pit was about to eat the two women alive!

After that, their path proceeded unhindered until they reached a room with four gates!

However, what was unique about the four gates was that each of them was made of special materials.

The first gate was made up of glass alone!

The second passage had a metal door.

The third door was actually made of burning magma!

And the final gateway was just a wooden gate with leaves growing here and there.

Above the gates, only a sentence was visible.

'Four paths, one destination!'

"Ah!" Reading that phrase, both the veiled woman and Henna yelped flabbergast!

"Hmm, what's up? Is something wrong?" Unclear about the cause of their surprise, Virus questioned.

"T-This is the hint the cultivator was talking about! Four gates of glass, metal, magma, and wood with the words 'Four paths, one destination' carved above them! This is place leads to the treasure room!" Taken aback, the veiled woman explained while pointing at the doors.

She also added, "The cultivator went through the wooden door, but it is believed all gates lead to the treasure room!"

"Hmm, is that so? Let's not waste any time then, let's go!" With that, Virus walked before the wooden door and tried pushing it open. Unfortunately, no matter how hard he shoved or pulled, it just wouldn't budge.

"That gate must be occupied, based on the cultivator's hint, only one group can enter a gate at a time as it gets locked up afterward. Try the magma gate!" The cheeky woman stated while fidgeting with her clothes.

"Is that so?" Heeding the advice, Virus tried pushing the magma door open. Woefully, it was also locked. Next, trying the metal door, while furrowing his brows, Virus knew it was also occupied.

'Hope no one's inside the final gate.' Deliberating that, Virus shoved the gate forward. If this door was blocked as well, honestly, Virus wasn't quite sure what their next plan of action should be since they might just be trapped here forever.

Fortunately, it didn't seem like they were that unlucky since the glass gate easily opened up!

"Let's go!" Signaling with his hand, Virus told them to follow him inside as they launched into it without further ado.

...

Currently, in front of the trio, Virus could see a tiled road that continued to the unperceivable distance.

However, the reason why the trio's eyelids jumped open upon laying their sight on the corridor ahead of them was that all around the tiled path was surrounded by ocean and water!

Meanwhile, apparently, there was an invisible wall that seemed to prevent any water from entering or leaking into the corridor itself, much like an aquarium.

"Woaaaah!" Watching the ocean surrounding the corridor while being unable to invade it for some reason, the veiled woman's eyes began to shine brilliantly while she jumped around in joy, inspecting here and there. She was absolutely enchanted!

"So beautiful!" She exclaimed watching the various types of sea creatures that passed by from time to time.

"Yeah, it is... until it's not, so let's just pass through here as quickly as possible." Through his experience so far, Virus was confident that every time there was a change in scenery, some kind of deadly trial or trap was waiting for them, therefore, he didn't want to stay here for even a single split-second.

After that, for two minutes, the trio sped through the aquarium corridor.

Throughout the entire way, the two women seemed to be mesmerized by the scenery around them, however, by Virus' insistence, they maintained their pace.

"I don't think there's any danger here-" the veiled lady had just muttered these words jovially when out of nowhere, a dark shadow was cast upon the trio.

Unconsciously, the trio raised their heads upward and looked at the source of the shadow, however, when their eyes landed on the origin of the shadow, the two ladies' face went ashen white at once while with a shake of his head, Virus helplessly voiced, "You jinxed it. Don't you know about the red flag?"

Right now, within the ocean in their line of sight, there was a gigantic creature sitting casually while staring back at them.

However, looking at its features, Virus thought it was oddly familiar since it was an enormous creature with the body of a lion and the wings of a bird with the terrifying head of a woman attached to its neck!

'The body of a lion again, but the head of a woman this time instead of a man's... and no scorpion tail. Additionally, this one has wings much like that of a bird.' He scrutinized while making a resemblance between the gigantic being in front of him and the Manticore he had confronted a while ago.

However, while the Manticore was just a couple of meters in size, this one's gigantic size was incomparable to it, so he couldn't just say it must be a female Manticore.

"The Sphinx." Rather, Virus could immediately connect this being in front of him to another mythological creature of the Earth of Technology called the Sphinx which originated from Ancient Greek itself!

"S-Sphinx? W-what is that?" With her voice cracking up due to the horror she was experiencing at the moment, the veiled woman barely asked.

Not responding to the question, however, Virus' attention was focused on the massive being in front of him as he studied the energy that was currently being released from all over its body.

Woefully, the more he examined the energy and tried to determine the possible cultivation level of the being in front of him, the darker Virus' face became.

'I can't even guess how powerful this thing is... probably a few stages above Liberation! Damn it, I don't think we can get out of this alive if the situation escalates to direct confrontation. What should we do?'

Meanwhile, considering how the Manticore had behaved pretty much similar to the general knowledge available on Earth, Virus hoped this one would do the same, or at least similar to a particular version of it!

Unlike the Manticore, the sphinx had several versions. Thus, Virus could only hope that this one was that version he had in mind.

At the same time, beside him, both Henna and the veiled lady continued shivering in fear while shuffling backward step by step gradually. Apparently, they wanted to escape from this place.

"Don't move, both of you. This creature is too strong. If it wants to kill us, there's no avoiding it. We would be dead before even realizing we're about to die, so stop the futile act already. You may just provoke it like that."

Catching the meaning behind Virus' words, Henna powerlessly fell on her knees as tears started to roll down her face. She had lost all hope of survival.

As a matter of fact, even the cheeky woman wasn't in any better shape as she was currently busy praying one last time, 'Oh, my goddess, please don't let me die right now! I haven't even gotten married yet!'

Indeed, being a few stages above the Liberation, Virus could only make a wild guess in regards to how terrifying the beast before them must be.

Nevertheless, as Virus began to wonder what their next logical course of action should be, an ancient yet mesmerizing sound of a woman overwhelmed them.

"ANSWER ME THIS RIGHT AND ENTER THE FIRST TREASURY, ANSWER ME THIS WRONG AND ENTER THE AFTERLIFE."

Chapter 456 - Rejoice!

"ANSWER ME THIS RIGHT AND ENTER THE FIRST TREASURY, ANSWER ME THIS WRONG AND ENTER THE AFTERLIFE."

Listening to the deafening yet appealing sound, Virus took a deep breath of relief while pondering, 'It must be the riddle version. That's great!'

"It means it will only attack and kill us if we get the riddle wrong." Murmuring that briefly, Virus turned toward Henna and the veiled lady as he explained how this trial was going to work.

As Virus was finished elaborating the situation, both women stared at the sphinx with gaping jaws. There was no doubt they were greatly nonplussed by the strange test where it didn't involve any type of battle whatsoever.

In fact, it was an extremely straightforward test, one either answers the riddle correctly and is rewarded, or that person answers it wrong and dies!

There were no other alternatives like answering it wrong and then escaping, fighting, or even perhaps killing the Sphinx since the monster in front of them was too strong for any of that to be an option!

"Really?" The veiled lady asked again, wanting to make sure she had heard right.

"Yeah. You two don't need to be worried though, I'm pretty good at this game. All you two need to do is remain silent and let me do the talking, is that clear?" Frowning a little, Virus reassured and warned them at the same time.

"But-"

"No buts! Just trust me and leave everything else to me."

Seeing the two finally nodding their heads, Virus no longer delayed the matter as he turned toward the Sphinx and declared. "We understand, please ask the first riddle."

"GOOD! HERE'S THE FIRST ONE! TELL ME THIS, WHAT IS IT THAT GIVEN ONE, YOU'LL HAVE EITHER TWO OR NONE?" The ear-splitting voice of the Sphinx reached the trio at once.

On the other side, catching the question, both women started feeling extremely anxious because no matter how hard they contemplated the question, they could not think of any possible objects that when given one turns into two or none.

Virus, however, didn't even need to think before answering the riddle, "It's a choice."

"..." Promptly, a deep silence descended upon the aquarium corridor as the Sphinx silently watched Virus' expression for quite a while.

Beside him, droplets of sweat were rolling down the two ladies' faces as they anxiously awaited the Sphinx's judgemental response.

"THAT IS CORRECT! YOU ARE PERMITTED TO ENTER THE FIRST TREASURY!"

"REMEMBER, YOU CAN ONLY BRING ONE ITEM BACK WITH YOU! IF YOU BRING MORE, THE GAME IS OVER AND YOU SHALL BE SENT ON A JOURNEY TO THE AFTERLIFE." The resounding warning of the Sphinx reverberated in all directions, reminding them to not be uselessly greedy and die a dog's death as a result.

Truthfully, its voice was so thundering and loud that the two ladies were feeling a sharp pain in their eardrums every time it spoke.

Following that, magically, four doors appeared in front of the trio in the very fabric of space itself while the Sphinx announced, "THE FIRST TREASURY HAS FOUR ENTRANCES AND FOUR SEPARATE ROOMS, ENTER!"

After that, the women and Virus briefly gazed into one another's eyes before Virus finally opened his mouth, "Just select whichever entry you desire, just don't choose the one I do, I'll also follow that rule and avoid yours, see you."

With that, turning around, Virus casually picked one before vanishing into it while leaving behind a harrumphing cheeky woman who screamed, "I don't wanna follow you too! Hmph!"

Entering the treasury, the first course of action Virus took was to inspect his surroundings. Currently, all around him, he could perceive hundreds of books neatly arranged. Each book was stationed above a platform as there were hundreds of such platforms visible at sight.

Ambling beside a platform, Virus casually picked a random book and looked at its title.

[Movement Technique Name: Dancing Lover, Class: Early-Human]

'Huh? What's this shitty book?' Putting it down Virus picked the second book from the second stand closest to him.

[Attack Technique Name: Qi Blade of Yitian Sect, Class: Mid-Human]

"Huh?" Furrowing his brows more, Virus quickly rushed to the other stands as he checked one book after another.

Alas, after half an hour of inspecting the various books, Virus noticed the highest-ranked was a mere High-Human class technique and that was in fact the only technique that had barely reached the High level.

"Such a worthless treasury." Feeling greatly annoyed by this shitty treasure room, disappointment overwhelmed Virus.

'If it was a Human-class technique I desired, I have shit tons of that, why would I even bother myself with these trashy techniques in this fucking room?' As this notion went

through Virus' head, he was just about to turn around and leave the treasure room empty-handed, when suddenly, his attention was drawn to a certain corner of the treasure room where a skeleton had long died at.

'I wonder how this person died here...' Having already deliberated regarding this mystery earlier, Virus' focus was now garnered to a certain object shining beneath the palm of the corpse. It was something he had missed previously due to standing in a different position.

Thus, rushing to the skeleton, Virus quickly picked up the unknown object and began scanning it. It was a metal container with the size and a shape just like that of a tube which is usually used in order to contain blood for testing in laboratories.

Casually playing with the small finger-sized container next, Virus tried making heads or tails of the tool in his grasp.

A few seconds later, abruptly, Virus' eyelids jumped open as he unearthed a fact, "Don't tell me it's..."

Immediately transmitting some of his energy from one of his liberated pathways into the tiny container, Virus discovered a change.

The moment he did so, amazingly, Virus sensed a connection establishing itself between his awareness and the container itself while he located two square meters of space within the tool in his palm. It was also precisely at that time when Virus yelped in recognition, "A Spatial Container!"

Indeed, just as Virus was claiming, what he was holding right now was something called a 'spatial container' which was something that's commonly used in the Cultivation Multiverse of Qi.

However, on this Cultivation Earth, truthfully, spatial containers seemed to be much more sparse in comparison.

Examining inside the spatial container, Virus' eyes were already glowing while a grin of joy crept over his face. "Nice! This is a good find. Even though it's just two square meters of space, a least it's better than leaving with nothing at all."

Next, no longer wanting to remain in this trashy room, Virus left without any further ado.

The instant he left, the four magical doors vanished on their own. At the same time, probing the faces of the two women who were already back, Virus could hardly detect any traces of happiness on their expressions.

Apparently, they were also quite let down by the treasures in the first treasury. Still, they had each chosen a High-Human class technique since they didn't want to return empty-handed.

"DO YOU WANT TO LEAVE OR PROCEED TO THE NEXT RIDDLE?" The blaring yet charmingly feminine voice of the Sphinx reached them once more.

Based on its words, Virus knew they probably had two options after each riddle was over, either to leave or continue risking their lives.

Of course, considering Virus' identity, saying he was risking his life in this trial would be nothing but an exaggeration. To be honest, Virus had already determined this trial of the Sphinx to be the easiest one so far.

Beside him, hearing whether they wanted to proceed to the next question or not, both the veiled woman and Henna felt very worried.

"Hot face, I think it'd be better if we leave. I mean that clearly wasn't the treasure room I was expecting... it doesn't make any sense to risk our lives over a bunch of Human class techniques, let's just leave, okay?" With her lips firmly pressing together beneath the veil, the cheeky woman proposed.

"Yeah, Vee! Let's just leave already, tell the Sphinx we don't want to proceed with the riddles please." Henna also remarked in a concerned tone.

Virus was about to respond and dispel some of their fears when out of nowhere, the Sphinx initiated a conversation on its own, "THE FIRST TREASURE ROOM IS THE LEAST VALUABLE ONE, THE SECOND ONE HAS BETTER THINGS INSIDE. THEREFORE, THE MORE YOU GET THE RIDDLES CORRECTLY, THE BETTER THE PRIZES SHALL BE, SO CONSIDER YOUR FINAL CHOICE VERY CAREFULLY."

Surprised by its unexpected interference, Virus gazed into the Sphinx's eyes and tried detecting the emotions that were currently exhibiting themselves on its face.

Soon, realizing something, a vicious grin crept over Virus' face. 'It's slightly clenching its jaws while its tone was unusually sharper just now. This Sphinx is obsessed with riddles just like an addicted gambler that keeps gambling until it loses everything. It believes it will win as long as the game goes on.'

Now feeling entertained by the Sphinx, while unconsciously licking his lips in anticipation, Virus was even more steeled to play with the Sphinx as much as it wanted.

"Let's hear the second riddle." Therefore, ignoring the two upset women, Virus urged the Sphinx to go on.

"GREAT!" Puffing out its chest, the anxiousness seemed to leave the creature's expression as smugness replaced it.

"WHITE BIRD, FEATHERLESS. FLYING OUT OF HEAVENS. FLYING OVER SEA AND LAND. DYING IN MY HAND. WHAT IS IT?" Even more pleased with itself, the Sphinx confidently awaited Virus' answer, apparently, it was much more self-assured this time.

Gently poking Virus' hand, the veiled lady brought its face closer to Virus as she whispered into his ears, "I think it's talking about an ice dragon. I mean think about it, a snow dragon could be considered a white bird. Dragons also don't have feathers, they have scales. Moreover, they can probably reach and fly out of heavens, fly over sea and land easily, and they may even die in that sphinx's hand if it is indeed strong enough!"

Hisss~

Promptly putting his index finger over his lips, Virus glared at her while signaling her to stay quiet and not say anything else out loud. Who knew if the addicted riddler would hear it and insist that was their reply. In case that truly happened, Virus would feel wronged even in death!

At the same time, directly looking into the titanic monster's eyes, Virus vocalized confidently, "It's definitely a snowflake. A featherless white bird that flies out heaven over lands and seas which eventually dies and melts in the hands of anyone that catches it."

Subsequently, after catching Virus' statement, a chattering noise resounded in all directions, which quickly brought a broad smile over Virus' face as he wondered, "Huh, it's annoyed right now because I'm right again."

"Y-YOU ARE CORRECT AGAIN! YOU MAY ENTER THE SECOND TREASURY!"

"Ah!" Covering her mouth using her slender fingers, the cheeky woman cried out in some trepidation while imagining their current situation in case she had carelessly opened her mouth earlier.

Briefly afterward, out of nowhere, four gates popped into existence, urging the three participants to dive in and decide their prize for this round.

Before that, however, throwing a simple glance at the countenance of the veiled woman who was still a little edgy regarding her previous close-call error, Virus reassured her, "Just trust me, okay? I'll get us out of here alive, go pick your reward now!" Harshly slapping her back right above her butt area, Virus tried easing some of her tension.

"Ahhhmm, you slapped my ass!" Blushing, the cheeky woman moaned in an excessive manner.

"No, I did not!" Feeling irritated, Virus denied. Nonetheless, seeing she was back to her normal state, a triumphant half-smile showed itself on his lips.

"Ah, okay, see you soon, hot face. Thanks for the ass slap by the way."

"Just shut up and go!"

Seeing her eyes curve up and narrow exotically, Virus understood that she was smiling behind her veil right now.

A few moments later, after the two women entered the same door together, Virus once again decided to launch into another one altogether.

To be frank, he preferred being alone without any distractions around while he was busy collecting his rewards, and that's why he entered another gate.

The instant he was inside, however, Virus noticed he was astonishingly facing a room filled with all types of weapons!

To be accurate, he was witnessing a wide range of cold weapons proudly displaying themselves over the various panels and platforms. There were knives, daggers, blades, swords, axes, spears, bows, crossbows, longswords, heavy swords, etc.

Nearly all kinds of weapons could be spotted beautifully placed above platforms and panels all around the treasure room.

Strolling toward the closest stage, Virus stared at an ax that had been put on display while checking its short description below.

[Ax Name: River Hacker, Power: 1st Tempering Item.]

With those few words, Virus shook his head as he felt quite let down with the said weapon.

Just as monstrous beasts were classified from the first to the tenth Order according to their level of cultivation and strength, all equipment in the world such as weapons, armors, helmets, etc. were also ranked.

The ranking for the equipment began from the 'First Tempering Items' to the 'Tenth Tempering Items' and Equipment.

Based on that, ordinarily, when a cultivator enters the Disentanglement Stage, the weakest weapon that would suit the cultivator needs to at least be a First Tempering Item.

At the Liberation Stage, the equipment of First Tempering would no longer be suitable to the said cultivator as that individual would be required to replace it with a Second Tempering Item at the very least.

And obviously, in the Sublimity Emergence stage, the bare minimum equipment that's necessary for wielding increases to the Third Tempering.

Why it's called 'tempering'?

The reason why the items and equipment were ranked as such mainly had to do with a subsidiary job called 'Blacksmithing' which many talented cultivators pursued.

In the Blacksmithing cultivation occupation, the level, durability, might, and other characteristics of the equipment were all determined based on the number of temperings the blacksmith was capable of achieving in that particular item.

For example, when a blacksmith succeeds in tempering a sword once, in addition to the types of material utilized, the energy of that blacksmith would also triumphantly influence the sword to an extent as the sword would be considered a sword of First Tempering.

If that blacksmith succeeds in tempering the sword twice in a row, the sword would naturally be elevated to the state of Second Tempering Item!

Of course, the issue of how many times exactly a blacksmith could temper an item was all dependent on the skills and proficiency of that specific blacksmith.

Nevertheless, after throwing a brief glimpse at the ax, Virus adjusted his eyesight to another weapon and its description

[Spear Name: Maim Spearposh, Power: 2st Tempering Item.]

"Nah... too weak." Whispering that, Virus referred to one weapon after another, and before long, he was finished checking all the weapons available in the treasure room as he successfully put together a list of the ranking of the weapons.

Subsequently, that information was automatically put on display.

[The number of each tempered item is as follows. First Tempering Weapons: 167, Second Tempering Weapons: 32, Third Tempering Equipment: 3.]

"I don't need the First or Second Tempered Items, which leaves me with these three."

After briefly inspecting the only three Third Tempering Weapons in this treasure room which happened to be a dagger, a longsword, and a sword, Virus referred to their description next.

[Dagger Name: The Quiet Killer of East, Power: 3rd Tempering Item.]

[Longsword Name: Great Reacher, Power: 3rd Tempering Item.]

[Sword Name: Steel of Darkness, Power: 3rd Tempering Item.]

'Which one should I choose?' Despite currently asking himself that question, from the moment his eyes had landed upon the Steel of Darkness, Virus had been reminded of his own 'The Darkest Night, The Shining Moon' which awakened many nostalgic memories for him.

Thus, grabbing the sword, Virus closely scrutinized its shape. The pitch-black cross hilt was followed by the graphite gray blade of the sword which was currently reflecting Virus' own image much like a mirror.

Moreover, from the hilt itself to nearly the tip of the sword, the middle section of the blade was chiseled by absolutely eye-catching marks that transmitted an emotion of luxury and chivalry to its wielder and foes alike.

"Rejoice! For you have been fated to a great master!" As Virus was finished uttering that sentence full of pride, the humming Steel of Darkness vanished as he stored it within his spatial container.

{A/N: The sword's picture is attached both here and in our Discord.}

Chapter 457 - Echo

While leaving the treasure room, Virus contemplated the possible consequences and benefits that will now result due to obtaining a new sword, a spectacular one at that.

The main 'disadvantage' that Virus was currently thinking about was the fact that now that he didn't have a longsword, his previous Twisting Tempest Thrust attack technique would become totally useless.

On the plus side, at the end of the day, the Twisting Tempest Thrust had been merely a Mid-Human technique which at most required four liberated pathways alone, denoting that its usefulness had already ended when he had broken through from the Fifth Level of Liberation.

Right now, Virus was at the seventh level of Liberation which was considered the first taboo of Liberation. Furthermore, he was about eighty-eight percent finished with that level and even hoped to break through to the eighth level provided some luck and the right circumstances.

Thus, when the bigger picture was taken into account, it was really a good outcome rather than a bad one.

Now, what Virus required was a Peak-Human class 'attack' technique to balance his might in nearly all aspects. Unfortunately, without even needing to check, he was aware that he had no such technique in his database.

However, frankly, that didn't mean he wasn't capable of getting his hands on such a technique. All he needed to do was begin the procedure of decrypting his attack techniques before sparking the development process of his own personal and peerless Peak-Human class skill.

Unfortunately, what was stopping Virus from doing so at the moment was the other operation that was occupying his mindscape as he was busy deciphering thousands of techniques in order to create the ultimate Peak-Human Movement skill.

Focusing on that subject, Virus noticed that there was already enough data to put together the second form of his unnamed movement technique. Moreover, with a little bit of time, he would be prepared to even put together the third form!

'The first form is called 'Impulse' and it requires five liberated pathways.' Massaging his chin in a passing, Virus went on with his deliberation process. 'My second form will now naturally make use of six liberated pathways, there's no doubt in that.'

'However, which attribute do I select and how should I take advantage of it? That is the question.' Whilst already having some ideas on the topic, Virus needed more deliberation period to come to a final decision.

Focusing his eyes on the path ahead, Virus realized that he was upon the exit gate by now. So, after a momentary pause and a glance at the treasury one last time, he took a step forward and materialized in front of the two ladies and the sphinx once again.

"Ah, that took you long enough." The veiled lady said with her clearly wronged eyes as if she was asking, 'How could you leave us alone with this ugly thing for so long? What if we were ravaged and slaughtered?'

"Well, I had to be careful with my choice. Anyway..."

After a brief clarification, looking up at the Sphinx, Virus demanded the riddles to continue.

Suddenly, a rather evil grin took shape in the Sphinx's eyes while its expression screamed 'You're dead now.'

However, outwardly, its tone was the same as before as it merely started elaborating a slightly different game design and rules.

"THE FOLLOWING RIDDLE GAME WILL BE A BIT DIFFERENT."

Rumble~

Just as it was done blaring the sentence, abruptly, the tiled floor began quaking as a huge tablet of stone sprouted into the trio's sight while the Sphinx proceeded.

The tablet was filled with a rectangular grid of white-shaded squares.

"THIS IS A RIDDLE GAME I INVENTED. I CALL IT THE 'RIDDLE ME TOGETHER'! THIS TIME, OUR LITTLE RIDDLE GAME SHALL BE EVEN HARDER!" The Sphinx announced.

Meanwhile, looking at the tablet filled with squares, Virus speechlessly thought, 'Isn't that a crossword? He thinks he invented that?'

'Well, it's understandable though. This small space is the entire world of the Sphinx, so whatever he comes up within his own closed space, he considers himself the first creator...'

Running his fingers through his metallic silver hair, Virus wondered the profound question, 'That makes me wonder whether the human race of my future world was like that as well... could there be another race out there in the infinite multiverses that is even more advanced than the human race of my future world.'

With an unfocused gaze, Virus listened to explanations of the monster while pondering to himself. 'Though this game of hers is indeed a bit different than your common crossword since I see no black-shaded squares, only white ones. That means one also has to accurately guess on their own how many letters the answer to a question contains. Hmm, that elevates the difficulty to a higher level I guess.'

"IN ORDER TO WIN THE RIDDLE GAME THIS TIME, YOU NEED TO GET ALL THE FOUR RIDDLES RIGHT. IN FACT, NOT ONLY DO YOU NEED TO GET THEM RIGHT, THE HORIZONTAL AND VERTICAL WORDS NEED TO CONCUR OTHERWISE-"

"No need to elaborate more, I got the rules already. Let's get to the game." Raising his arm, Virus interjected the beast. He wasn't going to waste his time and keep listening to something he was already aware of.

"IS THAT SO? THAT'S BETTER FOR ME ANYWAY, DON'T CRY WHEN YOU'RE ABOUT TO BE KILLED AND SAY THE GAME WASN'T FAIR THOUGH... YOU OFFERED THIS AND STOPPED ME YOURSELF."

"Yeah, yeah. Whatever, let's begin." Waving his palm around, Virus signaled the Sphinx to move on.

Displeased by his arbitrary behavior, the Sphinx continued with newfound vigor while looking forward to the time it could finally kill Virus. "OKAY. SO, THE FIRST RIDDLE FOR THE FIRST VERTICAL SQUARES IS THIS... MY THUNDER COMES BEFORE THE LIGHTNING. MY LIGHTNING COMES BEFORE THE CLOUDS. MY RAIN DRIES ALL THE LAND IT TOUCHES. WHAT AM I?"

Inspecting the first column, Virus saw that ten squares could be filled, signifying the answer either had ten letters or less. Therefore, with no delay, Virus prompted the monster to fill it with the word 'Volcano'.

"ARE YOU SURE? YOU KNOW YOU CAN'T EDIT THEM LATER ON WHEN YOU GET TO THE SUBSEQUENT RIDDLES. ALL OF THEM NEED TO CONCUR."

"I'm sure, tell me the next riddle." Waving again, Virus urged it to proceed.

Beside him, the veiled lady was absolutely silent as she had no intentions of opening her mouth in the slightest since she had already learned a dangerous listen at the earlier riddle game.

"ALRIGHT, YOUR UPCOMING ANSWER NEEDS TO FILL THE HORIZONTAL SQUARES WHILE CONCURRING WITH THE LETTER 'A' OF 'VOLCANO', SO THINK CAREFULLY BEFORE RESPONDING."

"WHAT CAN YOU HOLD IN YOUR RIGHT HAND BUT NEVER IN YOUR LEFT?"

'For real?' A little dumbfounded, Virus replied without any delay. "Left Hand."

Grrrr~

A low growl reached the trio at this time, forcing Virus to grin at the clearly frustrated behavior of the Sphinx. 'I'm beginning to think this titanic creature is somewhat idiotically cute, haha...'

"NEXT ANSWER SHOULD FILL THE VERTICAL SQUARES WHILE CONCURRING WITH THE LETTER 'H' OF 'LEFT HAND'."

"Sure..."

"I SPEAK WITHOUT A MOUTH AND HEAR WITHOUT EARS. I HAVE NO BODY, BUT I COME ALIVE WITH THE WIND. WHAT AM I?"

"Echo."

"..."

Chapter 458 - Miss...

By now, the Sphinx was obviously cursing Virus internally as its expression contorted to many incomprehensible shapes.

"THIS ONE IS THE HARDEST SO FAR SINCE THE ANSWER DEFINITELY NEEDS TO CONCUR WITH THE LETTER 'O' IN 'ECHO' AND THE LETTER 'N' IN 'VOLCANO' SINCE YOU ALREADY FILLED THEM AS SUCH. SO, TELL ME THIS..."

"WHAT TIME IS SPELLED THE SAME FORWARDS AND BACKWARD?"

"Noon." As laid-back as ever, Virus answered, obliging the monster to fill the row with his intended letters.

ROOOOAAAR!

Listening to the Sphinx roaring as if it had just experienced the worst loss of its life only made Virus feel like he was watching an amusing live drama in front of him. In fact, he kind of missed having a cup of tea right now.

What was supposed to initially amuse and entertain the Sphinx had now turned into a game that entertained Virus instead.

"T-THAT I-IS CORRECT! YOU MAY ENTER THE THIRD TREASURY!"

Following that, four new doors materialized in front of the three.

"See you soon guys." Smiling from ear to ear, Virus winked at the veiled lady and Henna before launching into one of the doors.

On the other side, having long become dumbfounded by the entire situation in front of them, the two women could only whisper to one another.

"He's not just good, is he?"

"Ah, no, hot face is more like a grandmaster at solving riddles, definitely! Smart, handsome, talented, and strong! Ah, I want him even more now!"

Ignoring the strange parts of her sentence, Henna confirmed, "Yeah, that's what I'm saying. He doesn't even think before responding."

"Well, let's go into a treasure room for now."

After entering the third treasury, the scene Virus perceived was tens of thousands of small wooden cases that had been stored over the panels installed all around the room.

"What's inside the cases?"

Gradually strolling beside a panel, Virus curiously grabbed a random case before opening it. The instant he opened it, however, a sharp aroma of various plants hit his nose.

'Hmm, a pill?' Closing the case, Virus picked another one, however, that one also contained a pill.

'So those are special cases that can maintain the quality of pills no matter how much time passes. But what's the information about these pills?'

Thus, Virus tried discovering any description or detail that might have been left on the panel or the case itself.

Alas, even after searching for nearly fifteen minutes, he could guarantee that there were indeed no details provided regarding this or any other pill for that matter. The only information was the name of the pills which were scrawled only on some of the wooden cases alone while the rest didn't even have their names carved.

"Nothing about their grades, effects, or whatnot, eh?" Although there wasn't even the most basic of information about any of them, Virus at least started checking the names of the pills that's been made available.

However, it didn't take long for him to notice that he was unknowledgeable about most of the names.

'Guess this is the bad thing about being in the ancient times of the past, most things are bound to be different from the future.'

Proceeding to another corner, Virus was just about to pass by a panel, when a particular name scrawled on one of the cases garnered his undivided attention.

"Absolute Liberation Leveling." Reading that title out loud, Virus' eyeballs nearly popped out of their sockets while his mind jumped to a specific name mentioned within his database.

In his past world of the future, in the Cultivation Multiverse of Qi, there was a record of an ancient pill the recipe of which had long gone extinct.

But, according to that information found and mentioned, a single one of those pills was said to be able to unconditionally raise the level of a cultivator in the Liberation stage by one entire level!

It didn't matter if one took it in the first level of Liberation or at the fifth, or even whether the synthesis rate was at once percent or ninety percent, the point was whenever a cultivator consumed an Absolute Liberation Leveling, the cultivator would immediately

be elevated to one percent synthesis of the following level in the most perfect manner possible!

In fact, not only was there a record of a pill like Absolute Liberation Leveling which mainly functioned in the Liberation stage, it was mentioned that there had been other pills like that in the ancient times of the past. Albeit, even the credibility of such information was questioned.

However, even though the Absolute Liberation Leveling pill appeared to be utterly omnipotent, it still had a major flaw that could not be ignored.

That flaw was the fact that it was just a one-time consumable item, meaning once it was taken, the body would immediately grow resistant to it as it would no longer be effective.

'Well, one time is enough for me anyway.' Picking the small wooden case, Virus didn't want to linger around as he turned around and left.

Just as he exited the gate, however, he discovered the bloody face of Henna who was anxiously waiting for something or someone.

The moment she spotted Virus leaving the gate, she ran towards Virus and started crying while muttering barely comprehensible words, "V-Vee... Miss, H-Hel... S-She..."

Swiftly grabbing her by the shoulders, a bad premonition crept into Virus' heart as he said gravely. "Calm down first. Then tell me what happened."

...

Several minutes ago, after watching Virus enter a random treasure room and holding a brief conversation with Henna, the veiled lady urged her, "Well, let's go into a treasure room for now, shall we?"

"Alright, miss." Casually picking a gate, the two launched inside.

Following quickly, just as brilliant smiles had occupied their faces after seeing the thousands of pill cases all over the room, the two suddenly spotted a group of familiar people within their treasury of pills.

"Huh?" With that, the two were instantly alerted as they cautiously locked their eyes at the countenances of the three unexpected intruders inside their treasure room. Subsequently, the veiled woman's eyes went wide open at once!

That was because two of the three individuals were respectively the third barbarian prince Ra and his loyal lackey Knightgruella!

"W-what are you two doing here?" Slightly perturbed by their existence there, while clenching her fists, the cheeky woman questioned.

In the meantime, as the trio had just come to be aware of the existence of Henna and the veiled woman, bewildered, they also glared in their direction in a stupor. Alas, their puzzlement only remained until Ra started laughing like a madman.

"Hahahaha, would you look at that? The supreme ugly came to me all by herself! Hahaha, and here I was considering searching around to find you."

"Grrrr?" Besides Ra and Knightgruella, the third individual who wasn't a human started growling in question. It was in fact a monstrous beast called the Purple-Maned Ancient Lion.

Amongst the group of representatives Virus had chanced upon prior to entering the Invisible Ancient Fortress World, this Purple-Maned Ancient Lion was the creature that had been standing beside Hadelia the entire time.. Apparently, this lion was the true representative of the monstrous beasts.

Chapter 459 - Purple Maned Ancient Lion

"Her? She's someone I was trying to get my hands on alone for a long time." Although Ra could not quite comprehend the meaning behind the Purple-Maned Ancient Lions grunts, he still pretended to understand as he responded to a hypothetical question a normal person would have asked in this situation.

After learning about the difficulty level of the Invisible Fortress, all the participants except the mysterious cloaked people had decided to team up with one another.

At the time, since the barbarians and the monstrous beasts had past dealings and close ties with each other, the barbarians had decided to team up with the representative from the monstrous beasts which happened to be the Purple-Maned Ancient Lion.

Indeed, they also invited Hadelia to join them as well, however, for some reason, Hadelia wasn't quite fond of the barbarians since she had come to dislike the barbarians' attitude. As a result, she was against teaming up with them. Instead, she chose to ally herself with the only surviving participant from the Academicians.

"Grrrrr?"

"I think you're asking why I didn't dare do anything to her outside the Invisible Ancient Fortress World? Well, that's obvious really. First of all, I wasn't this strong at the time. Second, I don't believe there weren't any elders protecting her from the shadows outside. So, I had to wait until we're inside."

"ROAAAR!"

Feeling troubled by the lion's angry howl, Ra could only try calming it down while waving around with her hands. "Okay, okay... calm down, I just can't understand what you're saying. So please don't be offended by me not getting what you're talking about."

Turning toward the veiled lady again, an evil grin beamed on Ra's face as he opened his mouth again, "What were we talking about? Oh, right... about how I'll beat you to death right here and now."

"Hmph! Who do you think you are? Do you think I'm scared of you or something? Dream on, you ugly ass bitch!" Cursing him like that, the veiled lady pointed her thumb at Ra. In her culture, pointing a thumb at somebody signified 'Fuck you!'.

"Just because you've allied yourself with that disgusting beast doesn't make you all omnipotent since that's not even your real strength. If you're truly confident, just come at me alone. I'm all up for a one-by-one duel."

"But if you don't want to, that's fine as well, Henna and I will just leave this treasure room at once and I'll have a go at your disgustingly smelly ass at another time." Displaying a mocking grin, the cheeky lady stated.

"Ah, right, I don't think you're daydreamy enough to assume the three of you are adequate to stop the two of us. I mean let's be honest here, you three may have some possibility of defeating us two ladies if we stayed here and confronted you guys, but if we wanna leave, we'd be gone before you guys even blink!" She was squinting her eyes at this point as if she just couldn't believe Ra was that naïve.

Listening to the cheeky woman's logical analysis, an unfathomable smile sat on Ra's mouth while he hummed a strange tune beneath his breath. For some reason, he didn't appear to be the least bit concerned about her escaping.

Instead, he readily accepted the duel request, "You're right, I won't be able to stop you in case you decide to run away right now, but don't worry, I never had the intention of ganging up on you, to begin with. Let's duel!"

Taking a step forward, Ra grabbed the huge hilt of his ax as he brought it before himself.

Although one might mistakenly assume that the enmity between the veiled lady and Ra had been sparked because of Virus, that couldn't be far from the truth.

The truth about these two was that their hostility ran much deeper as it had begun at another time in the past many years ago.

Since then, every time the two were put against each other in matches like famous martial contests or other races, they would put everything they had in order to strike or even fatally wound one another.

Thus, now that she had such a rare opportunity to battle this disgusting man possibly without anyone else's interference unlike in the past, she wasn't going to miss it!

And that's precisely why she was adamant about having a duel in this treasure room.

Turning toward Henna at this point, she advised her gently, "Don't interfere as long as they don't."

"..."

Finished with her reminder, the veiled woman wielded her staff and walked to the front.

The two opponents stepped forward while inspecting each other's poses cautiously. Next, just as she was about to charge in Ra's direction, suddenly, a huge amount of energy was released from Ra's body as it immediately put massive pressure on the cheeky woman's figure.

"Y-You... broke through!" Gritting her teeth, she mouthed in frustration.

"Hahaha... did I forget to mention it? Just before you came here, I found an amazing pill that helped me breakthrough to the next level... hahaha." Laughing uproariously, Ra started behaving as if he had already won the game.

Every time the two had confronted one another so far, their overall combat strength had been on the same level as a brutal fight would amaze all of their spectators.

This time, however, it looked like Ra had obtained the pill a little faster than her as he had temporarily broken the equilibrium that had been maintained for years now.

"If that's the case..." Reaching into her pocket, the veiled lady took out a specific pill and threw it into her mouth beneath the veil. It was the same pill she had also eaten before while engaging with the withered corpses.

Instantaneously, the pill started to show its effect as her energy's quality became much more chaotic to the level where it could almost compare to Ra's.

"Hahaha, at the end of the day, a fake boost is still nothing compared to a true boost in power!"

Bam! Bam! Bam!

Afterward, the two charged in each other's direction as an ax and a staff began clashing and colliding while producing devastating noises everywhere in the closed space of the treasury.

The two collided with each other several times and every time there was a skirmish, they would release their most powerful and savage attacks at each other without backing down.

However, just a single minute had gone by when the veiled lady's face began to get paler and wan by every second. She was almost at her limits.

Therefore, understanding that limit better than anyone else, she decided to retreat this time. "We'll settle this at another time."

Without further ado, she retreated in front of Henna who was waiting for her right at the place where their own gate back to the Sphinx was erected at.

"Let's go." Notifying Henna of their immediate departure, she was just about to leave when Ra's casual sentence garnered her attention. Strangely, Ra hadn't even taken a single step toward her like he had no intention of barring her path and stopping her from leaving, "Hmph! As expected of you, running away now that you know I'm stronger, what a bitch. Stay and fight me to death if you dare."

"Huh? Do you take me for a fool? Stay and die? Okay, I admit you won this time, but that's only because you just reached here faster than me and consumed a pill! But don't worry, in our next battle, I'll fight you to the death."

Quietly listening to her talk, at first, Ra didn't say anything, but then, he abruptly fell into a hysterical burst of laughter as if he had just heard the most absurd joke in the world, "Hahahaha... The next time we battle? You think you'd be able to leave?"

Feeling ridiculous by his illogical claim, the veiled lady began vocalizing, "Are you seriously an idiot? Try stopping me if you-"

STAB~

Suddenly, the cheeky woman felt a sharp prick at her back while also simultaneously feeling something penetrating her stomach. Thus, attempting to determine the source, she tilted her head down at full speed.

What she observed in her chest, however, promptly made her dumbfounded.

Currently, the sharp end of an unknown blade was visible right on her chest, which signified she had been probably stabbed in the back by someone.

Chapter 460 - But Why?

'B-but how? T-there was definitely no one behind me... except... no, it can't be.' Not wanting to believe it herself, she slowly turned her head backward.

Alas, subsequently, she caught a glimpse of what she wanted to avoid seeing the most!

The identity of the backstabber was in fact Henna!

She had used one of her double blades to impale her.

"S-Sister H-Henna... but why?"

"I'm sorry, miss. He sent an assassin to poison my little sister in secret. Now, only he has the unique antidote that's going to work." A fog of darkness was covering Henna's expressionless countenance as she uttered those words in a single breath.

"Y-You should've just told me that. I m-might have been able to help-"

Barf!

Suddenly, feeling like her stomach was churning, she uncontrollably expelled whatever that was making her uncomfortable. Unfortunately, all that came out was blood.

She was absolutely bewildered, unable to believe that Henna had betrayed her. Alas, the hole in her stomach that sent waves after waves of affliction was repeatedly proving otherwise as it forced her to wake up to the cruel reality in front of her.

"I couldn't risk her life, miss. She's the most precious family member I have left and there's nothing in this world I wouldn't do for her, even if I had to throw away my loyalty to you." Despite seemingly disheartened, Henna was the type of person that when she was put in a quandary, after making a decision, she would do so without any second thoughts whatsoever. That's how resolved of a person she was.

"I-I see... b-but what about me, sob... didn't you consider me your family as well? I-I thought of you as my s-sister..." By now, the cheeky woman couldn't stop the tears of grief and abandonment that were pricking at her heart.

Even though the betrayal of Henna, the person she deemed as an important sister, pained her heart even more than the sword that was pricking her back, she still turned toward Ra quickly and powerlessly aimed all her hatred at him. "Y-you! How could you do such a despicable thing? I knew you were a disgusting guy, but I didn't think you would be this wretched."

Albeit, her anger and abhorrence seemed to have the opposite effect on Ra who started laughing like a maniac. "Hahahaha... what a moving scene, I might even cry! But thank you for the compliment though, I must be a genius to be able to create such an emotional scene!"

Suddenly, a murderous aura was unleashed from Ra's frame while a sharp glint was in his pupils. "However, you're going to die here today without anyone even knowing, so I honestly don't care about your compliments."

"You know-" Just as the barbarian Ra was about to say something else, he noticed the veiled lady had gone unconscious.

As a matter of fact, she was feeling so much rage, hatred, pain, despair, and pity due to the backstabbing of Henna, that cheap plan of Ra, and the sword that was making her heart bleed more than her stomach, that she, at last, was pushed to the brink of her limits both mentally and physically as all power left her frame at once and she fainted.

"Huh? She fainted already?" Walking beside her fallen figure in a relaxed manner, Ra kicked her stomach as hard as possible.

BAM!

Seeing no reaction whatsoever, Ra was now certain that she was truly unconscious.

"Huh... should I wake her up before actually torturing her to death?" Just as he mumbled that and was about to proceed to his next course of action, Henna interrupted him.

"There's someone else you need to take care of. If I go back like this without the miss together with me, he might suspect and even kill me before we even leave the maze." As the image of Virus materialized in her mindscape, Henna requested Ra to kill Virus as well.

Slap!

"Huh? Why should I care about what happens to you, bitch?" Clearly not bothered about the fate of this lowly traitor, Ra slapped her and replied in annoyance.

The way he was looking at her was as if he was gazing upon nothing but a nuisance now that her use was over.

"Y-you!" Although that immediately angered Henna a great deal, she still coerced herself to ruminate logically before an idea popped into her head, "What if I tell you he's someone you have a grudge against as well?"

"Oh, go on?" Even though he quite didn't believe her, Ra still wanted to hear what she had to say.

"Don't you remember that guy that offended you outside the Invisible Fortress? That guy named Vee. He somehow succeeded in making it into the Invisible Fortress and partied

up with us. Yes, I'm talking about him! Now what? Are you sure you want to leave him be?" Grinding her teeth together, Henna questioned.

Initially, she had nothing but resentment toward this monster that had poisoned her sister, however, seeing how he was treating her after all she had done for him, her hatred climbed to an even higher peak.

Beside Ra, hearing Vee's name, Knightgruella who had remained quiet until now suddenly stepped forward and implored while gnashing his teeth.

"Please, boss. Kill him too, we've reached the point where he and I can't live under the same sky!" Knightgruella humbly begged.

"Huh! Like I wouldn't have done that without you telling me. I don't know how he escaped our men outside and actually entered the Invisible Fortress, but it doesn't matter. What matters is that he's here."

"Hmmm! Now that I brood over it more, this is great news actually since I get to kill the bastard with my own hands as well! Hahahaha..."

After cracking up for a while, he, at last, had enough of laughing and commanded Henna with a malicious smirk.

"Bring him to me and I'll take care of him for you."

"But before that," Abruptly dashing toward Henna, he ruthlessly punched Henna a few times.

Wham! Wham! Wham!

"Argh!" He punched her so hard that her face was now smashed and tragic just like that of a pig while blood was dripping from all over it!

"W-What are you doing?! Why would you do that to me!" Henna screamed in anger and even some fear.

"You idiot woman, he would suspect you if you just returned without any injuries whatsoever. Now, you can run back to him and tell him that your miss is in danger and needs your help! Go!"

Grabbing her by the arm, Ra easily tossed her into the gate that led back to the Sphinx.

"Now, we wait."

...

After Virus left the treasury, the first thing he witnessed was the bloody and anxious countenance of Henna who uttered a few broken words.

"V-Vee... Miss, H-Hel... S-She..."

Immediately grabbing her by the shoulders, Virus' expression became grave as he urged her to relax first. "Calm down first. Then tell me what happened."

Afterward, Henna began describing how after Virus had left, they had also picked a room and entered it.

Unfortunately, bad luck had come knocking on their doors since Ra and Knightgruella were waiting for them on the other side.