

Chapter 1584

Gerald glanced at them from sideways. It seemed as though their power was not to be underestimated.

Swish! Swash! Swoosh!

Three silver kunai were thrown out and hit the tree.

On each of the silver kunai, there were carvings of seven skulls, making them look rather creepy.

The three robbers froze, and their faces showed great horror immediately after.

“What? It’s actually the Seven Deadly Lords of the Earth Capital!”

Right after they realized who they were, the three robbers immediately knelt and kowtowed to them.

“Seven Lords, we did not know you would be coming here. We’re very sorry to have disturbed you. We shall leave right away and disappear seven miles away!”

They bowed to the Seven Deadly Lords. Not waiting for the reply from the Lords, they disappeared with lightning speed after casting a hateful look at Gerald.

On the other hand, Gerald simply ignored them.

After glancing at them, he lowered his head and continued eating.

Those few people glanced at Gerald coldly with a hint of killing intent in their eyes. However, Gerald was clearly not the one they were targeting.

So, instead of messing with Gerald, they simply sat down and closed their eyes, as if waiting for something.

Just as expected, after a while, the sound of fast footsteps was heard. It was a lady, and she was running without pacing, almost as though she was being hunted by someone.

When the lady saw the seven people sitting on the path in front of her, she stopped running, and her eyes were immediately filled with despair.

Soon, the people who were chasing her from behind also caught up with her.

Among the people, the leader was a young man wearing a robe.

“Hahaha! Miss Nori Zahn, just you run! Come on, why are you not running anymore?”

A man in a long robe smirked with his hands behind his back as he spoke.

“Zarek Mackowski, your family killed my family. I will surely get my revenge!”

The lady called Nori Zahn had a flash of determination in her eyes as she said that.

“Great. I shall wait for you to do just that. The only thing is that I guess we will have to solve the matters between the two of us in bed. What do you think? Why don’t you come back with me, and we will have a fierce three hundred rounds of battle in bed until one of us is drained? How does that sound? Hahaha!”

This obscene remark made everyone in the scene bark with laughter.

“How impudent!”

Nori Zahn raised her hands and wanted to fight back. This lady should be a Five-Rank Master already, but to Zarek Mackowski, she was simply too weak. Therefore, one punch was sufficient for him to make her fall on the ground once more.

Coincidentally, she fell somewhere near Gerald, who was not far away from them.

She gathered all her strength and got on her feet. Looking at the people on both sides who were closing in on her, she turned to Gerald with a pitiful look.

“Mister, could you save me?” said Nori.

However, Gerald simply kept on eating and did not speak.

“It turns out you are also a lackey of the Mackowski family!”

Nori was completely in despair now.

“I know nothing about the Mackowski family. I am only here for my personal matters. Why should I help you without any reason?”

Gerald had no idea about the grudges between the two families, so he was not willing to get himself into hot water.

From the way Gerald spoke and his calmness despite the situation he was in, Nori knew he was not just any commoner.

“I beg you. The Mackowski family has killed my family. I was barely able to escape, and I must take revenge. As long as you save me today, I will be willing to do anything for you. I will obey all your orders!”

Nori ground her teeth and begged with tears.

“No, I can’t. There are two very powerful men among them. I don’t want to burden myself any further!”

Gerald shook his head.

“You!”

Nori nearly fainted out of anger when she heard this.

She was now in a life and death situation, but look at this man! She truly wanted to say that he was an evil man, but on the contrary, he looked like a gentleman. However, she could not say that he was a kind man either because even though she was pleading so hard, he was just thinking about his own interests.

More importantly, although he still looked very young, he had a strong aura which convinced her that he was very powerful.

Therefore, she pinned all of her hopes on this man.

“Miss Zahn, stop struggling already. Don’t make me hurt you. Hahaha!”

Zarek Mackowski came over with a wicked smile.

“Wait, Zarek Mackowski. You must be blind. Can’t you see that my fiancé is here?!”

Nori bit her lips and shouted, her finger pointing toward Gerald.

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“Fiancé?”

Of course Gerald knew what the lady called Nori Zahn was trying to play.

At the same time, he was annoyed by her words.

Perhaps she didn’t realize what troubles her words would bring him.

Because now, Zarek and his gang were already looking at him differently.

“Fiancé? How interesting. Hey kid, which family in Earth Capital do you come from?”

Zarek laughed coldly.

As for Nori, she bit her lips and ran to hide behind Gerald immediately.

In truth, it could be easily seen that she was a very strong-willed girl. She would only do this now because she had no other choice.

Still, the only thing that she could not be sure of was whether this young man could win against the Seven Deadly Lords and the Mackowskis. Anyhow, she would not let a single chance of survival slip through her hands.

“I’ll depend on you now!”

Nori looked at Gerald and whispered to herself.

But out of her expectation, Gerald smiled helplessly at her.

“I don’t belong to any family. Besides, I am not the fiancé of this lady. We do not know each other. I am just a passerby. Mr. Mackowski, you can ignore me completely. If you have any grudge with this lady, you can just do whatever you want!”

Why would he let himself be used by someone else for her benefits so easily? How absurd!

“Crap...”

Nori opened her eyes wide in disbelief.

She never expected that this seemingly modest gentleman would be so cold-hearted.

She was instantly rendered speechless, especially when Gerald walked away with his hands at his back after saying such things.

'Oh my God, is there truly such a person in this world?! I, Nori Zahn, am so blind!'

"Hahaha! Nori Zahn, did you hear him? You, the young lady of the Zahn family, were actually refused by someone else! Besides, did you think it would be so easy to fool me?"

Zarek laughed out loud, holding his stomach.

"The Mackowski family is acting so ruthlessly just because you wanted to get the Primocorose! Now that you have already gotten the map that shows the mechanism of the traps in Underworld Valley from the Zahn family, must you kill us all?!"

Nori clenched her fists and spoke, her eyes filled with tears.

"Of course, to me, you and the map are equally important. You may be more important than the map, since having you is much more exciting! Listen, Seven Deadly Lords! You should step aside for now, because I can no longer hold in the fire in my heart! I want to f*ck this girl right now! Without my order, don't come here!"

As he took off his clothes, Zarek laughed lewdly.

As soon as the Seven Deadly Lords heard his words, they retreated immediately as they already knew his madness.

"You shameless b*stard! Son of a b*tch!"

Nori cried out in great despair.

She secretly took out a short dagger in her hand.

She had decided to end her life at any time.

Now that the Zahn family had perished, she had to preserve the last bit of dignity of her family.

It was better to die than to be humiliated.

“Hahaha! Baby, I’m coming!”

Zarek had finished taking off his top and pounced toward Nori immediately.

Slap!

Just as Zarek pounced on Nori and Nori closed her eyes, ready to stab herself with the dagger, a slapping sound was heard.

A hand was clasping Zarek’s shoulder.

Nori opened her eyes. It was the young man who had left just now. He had actually come back!

Without them realizing it, he was already standing behind Zarek.

“D*mn it, you brat! Are you asking for death?! Are you trying to play a hero to save the beauty? Do you know what price you are going to pay?!”

Zarek was enraged, and his face showed his intention to kill.

Gerald said calmly. "Just now, I heard you talking about the map of Underworld Valley. I reckon it's the key to get the Primocorose. Am I right?"

"B*stard! You are merely a nobody. How dare you dream of obtaining the Primocorose! You are just asking for your death!" Zarek roared in anger.

He raised his fist and aimed it at Gerald's face.

Slap!

Gerald knocked Zarek out with just one slap.

What a joke. This Zarek Mackowski was just a One-rank Chakra King at most, it was simply too easy for Gerald to beat him.

"What?!"

Zarek covered his cheek with his hand and looked at Gerald in disbelief. He did not expect this man to be so powerful.

Chapter 1586

"I'm asking you a question. Answer me!" said Gerald.

"That's right. The map that shows the mechanisms of the traps in Underworld Valley is the key to find the Primocorose. But the thing is, I snatched it from the Zahn family. So now, it belongs to the Mackowski family. Brother, don't tell me you haven't heard about my family?"

Now that Zaker knew that he was no match for him and had no idea where the Seven Deadly Lords were, he could only act submissively.

"No wonder the fog was so thick every time I went to Underworld Valley following the map. Looks like I guessed it correctly. There are indeed special traps in the valley."

Gerald finally found an answer to his question, and his eyes immediately lit up.

“You said that the map is with you, right?”

Gerald said excitedly.

“That’s right. Brother, you are indeed quite powerful. However, you will know how powerful the Mackowski family is by simply asking anyone. I can forgive you for your impoliteness toward me today, but I will advise you not to think about touching the map...”

Slap!

Before he could finish his words, Gerald had already given him another hard slap and thrown him to the ground.

Then, he even stepped on his face. “I have been searching far and wide. In the end, I found it by sheer luck! I have been looking for this thing for a month, and it has been with you all along!”

“Who... who are you actually?!”

Zaker asked in fear.

This man did not act according to the norms. His actions were completely unpredictable.

He had told him his family name, but he just did not seem to get it.

“It doesn't matter who I am. What matters is that since I’ve come across this map, it's mine to take. It’s something you snatched from other people anyway!”

Gerald smiled coldly.

Gerald saw a bag tied around Zaker's waist.

So, he raised his hand, and the bag flew to his hand right away.

"I know the method of picking the Primocorose! Please save me!"

Nori shouted as if he was her lifeline.

"Deal!"

Gerald smiled.

He wanted to leave right after he had gotten what he wanted.

"B*stard! How dare you be rude to Young Master Mackowski! You are asking for death!"

And as soon as Gerald turned around, seven shadows flew in his direction.

Swoosh.

They were none other than the Seven Deadly Lords.

As soon as they came forth, they were already showing open hostility to Gerald, and they struck him with their strongest blow.

Gerald could not dodge the attack, so he immediately kicked Zaker hard and sent him in the direction of the attack to block it.

Bang! Bang! Boom!

Seven strikes. It was too late for them to withdraw the attacks, so all seven strikes hit Zaker squarely.

“Argh!”

It was a loud and miserable cry.

Next, all they saw was the pulpy and bloody wound on Zaker’s chest.

“Young Master Mackowski!”

The seven lords landed on the ground and looked at Zaker, who was spurting blood uncontrollably, and their faces turned pale immediately.

They were so shocked that their legs gave out.

Zaker Mackowski was the only son of the leader of the Mackowski family in Earth Capital.

But now, he had actually been killed by them?!

Even if they ran to the end of the world, they would not be able to escape death.

Looking at Zaker, who was almost unable to survive, Nori felt relieved and scared simultaneously.

“Let’s go, quick!”

Nori told Gerald hurriedly.

Since Gerald had gotten what he wanted, he was too lazy to entertain the Seven Deadly Lords. So, he used his levitation spell and disappeared from the ground along with Nori.

“Young Master Mackowski! We didn’t mean to!”

The seven lords knelt beside Zaker and cried, not daring to say anything.

“Quick... Go... and get my father! Get him to save me!”

Zaker’s body was trembling uncontrollably. As he vomited blood, he forced himself to squeeze this sentence out of his mouth...

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“Zaker!”

Moments later, Yusef Mackowski arrived with his men.

As soon as he saw his son, who was dying, he was devastated.

The Zahn and Mackowski families had ruled the entire Earth Capital for many years.

Eventually, the Mackowski had become the dominant family in Earth Capital.

Yet, unexpectedly, their only son, Zaker Mackoski, who was regarded by Yusef as the future heir of the Mackowski family, had actually suffered such a serious injury.

“Were you the ones who harmed Young Master?!”

Yusef was now full of malicious intent. He was glaring at them and releasing a strong aura from his body.

The aura was enough to make the Seven Deadly Lords shiver and fall to the ground.

A Nine-rank Chakra King was simply too horrifying.

How could they withstand his strong aura?

“No, Master! Young Master was hurt by the daughter of the Zahn family and a young man she conspired with. Besides, the young man snatched away the map of Underworld Valley. We tried to attack him, but he used Young Master as a shield to block the attack. Young Master’s injury had nothing to do with us!”

The leader of the Seven Deadly Lords, who was blind, said as he sobbed in fear.

“A young man?”

Yusef sounded very cold.

“Hmph. Since they have taken the map, they must be heading to Underworld Valley now. They are certainly not far away! I have stabilized Young Master’s condition. His life is no longer in danger. Send him back, and I shall catch up with that b*stard and retrieve the map!”

Yusef ordered coldly.

Meanwhile, a strong killing intent flashed through his eyes.

Boom!

Before the crowd could salute him, they saw a flash of light, and Yusef Mackowski was already gone.

As Gerald and Nori were on their way, Gerald stopped walking suddenly.

“Hey, why did you stop? With the map of the Zahn family in hand, we can get to Underworld Valley before dark. It’s only a stone throw away from here!”

Nori couldn’t help but ask in confusion.

“No. My divine eye is flickering. It makes me feel uneasy. When this happens, it means that our trip this time is very dangerous. I have destroyed Zaker Mackowski, so I think that the Mackowski family will not let things go easily for me. Maybe, they have even already learned about what happened just now and are heading to Underworld Valley. So, we cannot go there now!” explained Gerald.

“It can’t be, can it?” asked Nori.

“Why not? It’s you who said that the Mackowski family has been in power for hundreds of years in Earth Capital. Do you think the members in the family are mere idiots?”

After saying that, Gerald surveyed their surroundings. “The only thing we can do now is to hide and observe what happens next!”

However, as soon as he had said that, they heard a huge gust of wind.

“Hey, kid, where are you trying to go?”

A loud voice was heard resounding throughout the forest.

They felt the cold wind blowing and saw the leaves falling.

Whoosh!

There was a loud noise, and they saw the falling leaves gathering at a high speed, forming a huge orb in just a short time.

With a strong murderous aura, the huge orb of leaves charged toward Gerald.

So that was the power of a Nine-rank Chakra King!

Gerald's eyelid was twitching crazily.

He grabbed Nori's arm and backed up several times.

However, the orb was extremely fast.

Zap!

Holding Nori with him, Gerald leaped into the sky.

Boom!

There was a loud explosion, and the earth shook. Even the big trees in their surroundings were crushed into pieces in no time.

The orb of leaves then dispersed and flew across the sky.

Gerald took a few steps backward. This essential qi was too strong.

"Well, well, well. What a good young man who dared to harm my son! Today, I will cut you into pieces to avenge my son! If you are sensible enough, you should hand over the map and accept your death penalty quietly!"

Above a tall tree, Yusef Mackoski descended to the ground like a god with his hands crossed in front of his chest.

Chapter 1588

Yusef Makowski was the leader of the Mackowski family in Earth Capital. He was also a Nine-rank Chakra King. Hence, he had divine power.

“Gerald, what should we do now?! He came too quickly. Moreover, his cultivation level is extremely high!”

Nori grabbed Gerald’s arm desperately.

Gerald had clearly underestimated the ability of a Nine-rank Chakra King.

In truth, his divine eye had already sensed him earlier on. He should have left immediately at that time.

He was a Nine-rank Chakra King after all. His speed could not be judged using the standards of any common cultivators.

Right now, Gerald was working out the best plan in his heart quickly.

After experiencing the first attack, Gerald could distinctly feel the gap between his and Yusef’s strength. If he was to fight with him head-on, he would be as good as dead.

His opponent was in the ninth rank, a rank that even he, who owned the Herculean Primordial Spirit, found very hard to achieve.

“Hey, kid. You are quite impressive. You are already an Eight-rank Chakra King when you are still this young. It looks like I must eliminate you today, or I will face big troubles in the future!”

After sizing up Gerald, Yusef was at first shocked by Gerald’s cultivation level. Then, he immediately revealed his intention to kill Gerald unreservedly. He was determined to kill Gerald.

“No matter what, let’s try first!”

Gerald had made up his mind.

He raised his hand right away. “Leader of the Mackowskis. Although I , Gerald Crawford, am already an Eight-rank Chakra King, you should know very well the gap between me and you, a Nine-rank Chakra King. If we were to fight against each other, I will definitely not be a match for you!”

“Haha! Kid, glad that you are aware of this. Then, tell me, how are we going to fight against each other?”

“My suggestion is that we give each other three strikes. Then, we shall see who falls after the three strikes! Well, you can certainly refuse my suggestion since you are the one who has the say now!” said Gerald.

“Very well, kid. Are you trying to provoke me? Nevertheless, my son is already half-dead after being beaten by you. No matter how eloquent you are today, you won’t be able to escape death! However, I can see that you have a unique spiritual essence. If I can get your spiritual essence and use it on my son, it will not be a bad remedy to treat his injury! Since that is the case, I am worried that I might destroy your spiritual essence if we truly fight against each other. So, yes, I will accept your suggestion. Let’s hit each other with a strike now!”

Yusef laughed coldly and descended slowly in front of Gerald.

“Kid, let’s go!”

Yusef folded his arms across his chest, completely disregarding Gerald.

“Then, I shall not show mercy anymore!”

Gerald gathered all the essential qi in his body and transferred it into his palm.

Following that, he gave Yusef a heavy strike.

Bang!

Once it hit Yusef, Gerald felt a sharp, tearing pain on his palm. It was as though he was hitting a big mountain, and he could not even break Yusef's defense.

Bang!

The essential qi rebounded, and Gerald took several steps back due to the momentum.

A Nine-rank Chakra King and an Eight-rank Chakra King. The gap between the two was simply too big!

Gerald was horrified.

"This is the second strike!"

Gerald cared no more and struck him the second time with all his might.

The rebound was even more violent than just now.

Gerald felt the rebound from his hand to his back, and he spurted out a mouthful of blood, taking a few steps backward.

"Hahaha! How ignorant! Kid, although it is a rare occasion for someone so young like you to be an Eight-rank Chakra King, you will never be able to break my Heavenly Dipper Protection Technique! So, you can only die when I am your opponent!"

Yusef Mackowski threw back his head and laughed.

"Gerald, can you handle it or not?"

Nori asked anxiously.

“This is the last strike!”

Gerald forced himself to stand up once more. He ground his teeth as he tried hard to maintain his posture.

He gathered his essential qi and pounced on Yusef once more.

“Hahaha, it is useless!”

Yusef shook his head.

However, in the next second, he was stunned.

The next thing he saw was when Gerald closed his eyes, an eye actually grew on his forehead.

Then, a powerful golden beam came out from that eye.

“What?!”

Yusef was stunned...

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By the time Yusef wanted to react to what he had seen, it was already too late.

The light was too difficult to block as it had come very suddenly.

The light hit his eyes directly, and he stumbled a few steps backward. His head spun crazily, and he fell to the ground.

Taking advantage of this opportunity, Gerald ran, taking Nori along with him.

“B*stard, how dare you play dirty tricks on me! Today, I, Yusef Mackowski, will break you into pieces!”

Yusef’s spiritual power was heavily damaged. Now, he was looking at Gerald's back who was running away in the opposite direction unwillingly, but he could only gnash his teeth with hatred.

Gerald did not dare to delay any longer.

He knew that his power was too weak. Even with the help of his divine eye, he could only hold Yusef off temporarily. Now, hiding was no longer possible.

The only thing he could do was to rely on the map and get into Underworld Valley. Using the traps to their advantage, they could somehow block Yusef from getting to them.

On the way there, Gerald examined the map thoroughly and imprinted all the details on the map into his brain.

Then, he destroyed the map for good.

Taking Nori with him, they entered the valley, which was covered in thick black fog.

“Phew, we should already be somewhere at the center of Underworld Valley. Yusef Mackowski shouldn’t be able to catch up already, right?”

Nori spoke as she panted heavily, scanning the eerie surroundings.

“Not necessarily. Yusef Mackowski is not that easy to deal with. We'd better be careful!”

Gerald said, cocking his eyebrows.

At the same time, he surveyed their surroundings vigilantly.

Since the moment they entered Underworld Valley, Gerald had managed to dodge many deadly traps with the help of the map. However, the map was not a panacea. Along the way, they bumped into many ancient beasts which made them into a mess.

For instance, they encountered a Yellow Stone Viper just now. If it hadn't been for Gerald's fast reaction, that venomous snake would have already killed them in seconds.

Therefore, Gerald was very cautious.

Squeak squeak...

Suddenly, the distinct sound of rolling wooden wheels entered their ears. It was very clear.

"Listen Gerald. What is that?"

Nori's heart almost leaped into her throat, and she looked around in panic.

The sound was getting clearer and clearer.

"I heard it. Shh!"

Gerald gestured for her to be quiet.

He put all his attention into the sound. Finally, he managed to identify the direction of the source of the sound in the dark.

At that moment, he vaguely saw the object in front of him,

“Argh!”

Nori cried out loud in fear and hid behind Gerald.

In front of them was a wooden wheelbarrow. On the wheelbarrow, there was a big red wooden coffin.

The wheelbarrow could move on its own, and it was heading toward them, carrying along the wooden coffin on it.

Squeak squeak...

They could hear a creaking sound, almost as if the wooden board was about to shatter at any time. It also meant that there might be something big in the coffin.

It was also Gerald’s first time seeing such a bizarre scene. It would be a lie if he said that he was not in panic now.

“It can’t be a hiderigami, right?”

Gerald was talking to himself, somewhat confused.

To put it simply, a hiderigami was a dried corpse. In simpler words, a zombie.

This thing had been created by using a corpse. The corpse would absorb the essence of the sun and moon and transform into a corpse demon.

It was vicious and bloodthirsty, infinitely powerful and immortal.

In truth, Gerald had learned all of these things from movies.

“Zombie?! Gerald, stop scaring me already! Why is there such a thing in the valley?!”

Nori swallowed her saliva.

“This valley is at least ten-thousand years old. I wouldn’t be surprised if a dinosaur appeared in front of me!” said Gerald.

Gerald was about to grab Nori’s hand to walk away from the coffin when suddenly...

Boom!

The wooden wheelbarrow moved and charged toward Gerald.

“Get away from me!”

Gerald pushed Nori to the side.

Then, he took up a sword-wielding gesture, and a sword flew toward the wooden wheelbarrow immediately.

However, it was almost as if the wooden wheelbarrow were a living thing, and it dodged the sword easily.

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A loud bang was heard, and Gerald’s sword hit a big stone behind it, smashing it into ashes.

Bang!

The next moment, a puff of white smoke came out from the coffin.

It was as if the lid of the coffin was transformed into a divine arrow, and it flew toward Gerald.

Slap!

Gerald blocked it with his palm.

Once the battle started, Gerald was appalled.

A strong force appeared, and it dragged Gerald a few ten meters backward.

“Gerald, are you alright?”

Nori asked quickly in concern.

Honestly, although Nori was using Gerald as a means to survive, she was sincerely worried about him when she saw him get injured.

After all, it was not the first time Gerald had saved her.

If it wasn't for him, she would already be dead.

“This thing is so powerful! It's just another Yusef Mackowski!”

Blue veins bulged on Gerald's arm, and he could feel a tingling sensation in his arm.

Meanwhile, white smoke was still coming out from the coffin.

Then, they saw a pair of ancient official boots slowly appear from the inside of the coffin.

After that, it was a two-meter tall corpse which was wearing an official robe standing in front of the coffin, its black face covered in green hair, and it had green eyes and two big white fangs.

Its hands were like steel forks, and its fingernails were almost twenty centimeters long.

“Zom... It’s a zombie!”

Nori quickly helped Gerald up.

Roar!

The zombie stared at Gerald and Nori for a while. Then, it started to roar.

He pounced on Gerald, and his one leap was enough to cover a distance of twenty meters.

His body was like a small hill, covering them completely from above!

Divine eye!

Gerald shut his eyes tightly, and the third eye appeared right away.

Boom!

A powerful golden beam struck the zombie.

Bang!

However, the attack was only able to make it pause for a second. It was hopeless.

Gerald wanted to fly away. However, the zombie had already arrived before his eyes, and it grabbed his shoulders.

His strength made Gerald feel as though he was locked by an iron chain made from a-thousand-year-old refined iron.

It was very difficult to break free.

Roar!

The zombie flung Gerald ruthlessly.

Gerald's body smashed more than thirty boulders into ashes.

After only one attack, Gerald felt as if his body was about to break into pieces. He almost couldn't gather his essential qi anymore.

This beast was simply too strong!

Gerald held his chest in horror.

The zombie, which was blowing black smoke out of its mouth, was slowly walking toward Gerald again.

"Monster, you'd better not move another inch! You and your son were killed by your enemy and buried here, which is why you have such deep hatred. If you dare to move another inch, I will destroy your son's swaddling clothes!"

As Gerald was spurting out blood and had no idea how to deal with the situation, Nori had run to the red coffin. She forced herself to endure the foul stench to take out the embroidered swaddling clothes of a baby.

The corpse of the baby had long since disappeared, and only the swaddling clothes were left behind.

This item was clearly very precious to the zombie, and it actually stopped in its tracks immediately.

Roar!

It roared angrily at Nori.

Evidently, when Gerald had been fighting against the zombie, Nori had seen the written record about the owner of the coffin on the coffin lid while she had been panicking.

Regardless of whether it worked or not, she had tried, and so, there was this scene.

Nevertheless, Nori had certainly made the right bet!

Chapter 1591

“Hurry and get on your feet, Gerald!” shouted Nori as she ran over to help pull him up.

Seeing that she had grabbed the swaddling clothes—that honestly looked more like a rag by now—Gerald then held it in hand before threatening, “Take one more step forward and I’m destroying this thing! Come on, I dare you!”

Upon hearing that, the zombie instantly roared!

To both their surprise, however, the zombie actually lifted both its arms before taking quite a few steps back!

Clearly an indication that it wasn’t going to make any other rash moves, Nori then sighed in relief before saying, “...I really hadn’t expected this thing to actually retain its humanity!”

Just as Gerald was about to breathe his own sigh of relief, a roar of laughter could suddenly be heard booming across the sky...

Following that, a blinding flash could be seen... and seconds later, a figure dropped from the sky in a beam of light!

Landing right before Gerald, the figure fumbled for a bit, possibly due to the aftereffects from Gerald's earlier attack...

Of course, who else could that have been other than Yusef himself.

"You son of a b*tch! Did you really think you could get rid of me that easily just because you now have the map of the Underworld Valley? I'll have you know that as long as I've lived throughout these hundred years, nobody's been able to escape my grasp! Regardless, it seems that you have something interesting in your body! In a scenario where both of us had the same level of training, firing that divine vision would've surely caused my brain to suffer much worse injuries! With that in mind, I'll be sure to claim that interesting thing inside you once you're dead!" declared Yusuf as he clenched his fists before laughing again, his eyes filled with mockery.

'I'd like to see how you'll attempt another round of escape!'

“You absolute b*stard! You’ll surely die terribly one day, Yusef!” shouted Nori in her despair.

“Even if that day ever came you wouldn’t be able to witness it!” scoffed Yusef as he smiled, ready to capture Gerald.

“I find it funny how you think you can just capture me that easily!” replied Gerald as he patted his chest.

Laughing in response, Yusef’s smile turned slightly bitter as he shook his head before saying, “What other abilities are you hiding? Show them to me now! Since you’re going to die soon anyway, I’ll let you hit me three times again if you fail to display something strong enough!”

“You asked for it! Here’s my secret weapon!” replied Gerald as he instantly tossed what was in his hand!

Upon closer inspection, it was the swaddling clothes from before that Gerald had crumpled into a ball!

However, Yusef grabbed it with extreme ease!

“You b*stard! An old rag? Seriously? My magnificent strength must have scared you stupid!” shouted Yusef as he laughed aloud.

Following that, Yusef slowly lifted the balled-up swaddling clothes in one hand... and the next thing Gerald and Nori knew, Yusef’s hand began burning!

With the swaddling clothes still in hand, it turned to ashes in no time at all...

The second the clothes were nothing but dust, three successive roars filled the air...! It was the zombie from before!

Having witnessed the waddling clothes getting burnt into a crisp, the zombie now glared murderously at Yusef as the purplish-green hair all over its body rapidly began darkening.

It was only when the zombie began releasing a constant stream of black smoke from its mouth that Yusef finally sensed its demonic presence.

“...Fezrumoz?” muttered the slightly bewildered Yusef as he stared at the zombie.

Fezrumoz was quite famous within the Underworld Valley as a vicious and cruel beast. With that in mind, Yusef definitely knew who this zombie was, and he was also aware that it had the same amount of training as a Ninth-rank Chakra King! Aside from its immense strength, the beast was pretty much immortal as well!

In short, only someone who had managed to enter the Sage Realm could have a chance of even killing the zombie for good. Knowing that, a fearful expression was instantly displayed on Yusef’s face. It didn’t help that the zombie was looking at it with such murderous intent.

“What do you plan on doing, Fezrumoz?” asked Yusef as he took two steps backward.

Fezrumoz, however, gave no reply. Instead, the zombie simply charged toward the man with frightening levels of murderous intent!

Seeing that, Yusef immediately began making his retreat!

Chapter 1592

Even so, no matter how far Yusef went, Fezrumoz simply continued pursuing him!

Seeing that running wasn't doing him any good, Yusef then shouted, "You b*stard! How dare you! Continue chasing me and I'll burn those swaddling clothes of yours! Once I do that, your pitiful child won't even have any bones left behind! You wouldn't want that, would you?!"

According to the rumors that Yusef had heard before, one didn't need to panic or run whenever they bumped into Fezrumoz. The only thing one needed to do to scare the beast off was declare that they would snatch the zombie's swaddling clothes if it came any closer.

While it should have stopped Fezrumoz from attacking any further, the zombie only began attacking even more viciously after hearing Yusef say that! Yusef's words seemed to have only infuriated it even more!

“What the hell? Why aren’t you stopping?!” grumbled Yusef with a frown.

In his state of panic, he turned to look at Gerald and Nori... Only to realize that both of them had already made their escape! There was no way he was going to be able to pursue them any further!

At that moment, he turned to look at what he was holding... and it was then when he finally realized what Gerald’s ‘secret weapon’ was.

“You... You mother*cking b*stard...! No wonder Fezrumoz is being this murderous! You tossed me the swaddling clothes of the baby that it adored most!” cursed Yusef as he glared in the direction that Gerald had initially been standing in.

Though the now sweaty Yosef wanted to curse even more profanities, Fezrumoz was still chasing him, and the man knew better than to waste his breath.

It was sometime later when Nori asked, “We... should be near the Primocorose, right, Gerald...?”

With both of them now walking around in the darkened valley, Gerald then replied, “If the map’s directions are accurate, then we should be arriving soon. Even so, we’d best take a rest in the valley first. I’m injured now and I don’t wish to place myself in danger yet. We can look for the Primocorose tomorrow.”

Thankfully, both of them found a cave, and after Gerald made sure it was safe inside, both of them then entered to stay the night.

Sometime later, Gerald was sitting cross-legged, slowly allowing his body to heal when he suddenly heard Nori say in a softened voice, “Um... Could you do me a favor, Gerald...?”

“What is it?” asked Gerald as he opened his eyes.

“...Well... there’s a pool over there... and we’ve been traveling for quite some time now so... I was wondering if I could take a shower...” muttered Nori as her face blushed slightly.

“Go on ahead. You don’t have to worry about me peeking!” replied Gerald as he shook his head with a bitter smile.

“...But... That pool’s simply too close to this place! I’m not saying you will, but temptation’s a thing, you know? We’re talking about a woman taking a shower here! There’s no way I can do that with you so close by!” mumbled Nori as her cheeks reddened even more.

Staring back at her, Gerald felt that this woman really was something else... At times she was rather stingy, and during others, she was honestly quite righteous... Then there were the times where she could be rather annoying. This moment was a perfect example of that.

Shaking his head, Gerald then asked, “Fine, what do you want me to do then?”

“I’d... like you to lend me your shirt for a while! I’ll be using it as a curtain between us!” explained Nori.

Sighing as he shook his head again, Gerald then did as she suggested before closing his eyes again to rest.

In the end, however, Gerald still ended up frowning slightly when he heard the soft crinkles of Nori undressing herself. He was still a man, after all, and he was unable to remain calm for much longer.

Upon opening his eyes, he subconsciously turned to look in Nori's direction... However, what he saw shocked him.

"Nori!" shouted Gerald as he instantly got to his feet.

"Wha- Gerald! You promised you wouldn't look!" shrieked the now angered woman.

"Look, just hurry over!" instructed Gerald.

Thankfully, Nori had only taken off her coat by that point, and after covering herself, she instantly stomped toward him before angrily grumbling, “You better have a good explanation for this!”

Looking at the furious woman’s face, Gerald simply sighed before saying, “Just... turn around and look for yourself! There’s some kind of figure hovering above the pool!”

Chapter 1593

Upon hearing that, Nori instantly screamed before running over to hide behind Gerald!

Neither of them had earlier noticed the presence of the sword that had probably been hovering above the pool this entire time. The more shocking thing, however, was the fact that a black figure could—in turn—be seen faintly hovering atop the sword!

“W-who are you...?” demanded the frightened Nori.

“I go by Jade Infused Blade!” replied the figure in a rather faint mechanical tone.

“You... How could you be this despicable...? Were you waiting to see my bare body...?” mumbled Nori,

too embarrassed to say it out loud.

“Before any further misunderstandings take place, I’ll have you know that I’m blind, miss. I only came over since I sensed my master’s aura within the vicinity,” explained Jade Infused Blade as his body slowly solidified...

Once he stepped closer, Gerald and Nori saw that Jade Infused Blade was actually a long-haired warrior donning black armor.

“Your master...?” asked the surprised Nori.

“Indeed. Regardless, is that really you, master? It’s been thousands of years since we’ve last met! You’re finally back!” replied Jade Infused Blade in a rather hoarse and concerned voice as he looked at Gerald.

Frowning slightly, Gerald put two and two together before asking, “This... Master of yours... Could you be referring to Liemis? The God of Battle?”

“I am! So it really is you, master! Though it’s been so long, I still managed to recognize your voice almost instantaneously! How have you been?” replied Jade Infused Blade as he knelt before Gerald.

“...H-huh...?” mumbled the shocked Nori who was having a bit of trouble registering all this.

“I have a feeling you’re mistaking me for someone else. While it’s true that I have a rather deep relationship with Liemis—he was the one who had taught me all the skills I currently know—I’m not Liemis himself. My name is Gerald Crawford!” explained Gerald.

“But... your voice... And that imposing aura! It’s near-identical to Liemis’s! I trust my intuition on this!” insisted Jade Infused Blade.

“I’m afraid Liemis has already passed on thousands of years ago. If you still want proof of that, I have his corpse with me right now. Regardless, I’ll be returning to Jaellatra sometime in the future in order to inquire about Zyla’s location. Once I find her, I’ll finally be able to bury Liemis’s corpse in his homeland! He’ll finally be able to rest in peace!” replied Gerald who truly hadn’t expected to bump into Liemis’s old subordinates.

Either way, upon hearing Gerald's explanation, Jade Infused Blade instantly felt an acute pain in his heart.

"Those from the Sun League must be the ones responsible for killing my master... He was ambushed by them in that large battle that year!" growled Jade Infused Blade as he clenched his fists while gritting his teeth.

"The Sun League?" asked Gerald.

This was the first Gerald had heard that name being mentioned ever since he came here. While Gerald already knew that the Sun League was responsible for quite a few incidents on earth, he could've never imagined that it was the Sun League who had ambushed Zyla and Liemis back then.

No wonder Zyla kept telling him that it wasn't the time to learn about the Sun League yet when he first inquired her about it. He now understood why Finnley had reacted the same way as Zyla had as well.

Despite Liemis's immense strength, he still ended up getting killed by the Sun League! With that in mind,

there was no way that Gerald was going to even stand a chance against them!

“...I think I get it now!” said Jade Infused Blade—looking rather enlightened—out of the blue.

Chapter 1594

“Figure something out?” asked Gerald.

“Indeed! From what I’ve managed to gather, it appears that you’re the ninth reincarnation of my master! If you don’t mind, could you tell me whether you look identical to my master?” asked Jade Infused Blade rather anxiously.

Though Gerald had actively denied that he was Liemis’s reincarnated form this entire time, he felt the need to answer honestly this time.

With that, Gerald then nodded, “That’s right! I look exactly like him!”

“Then that settles it! You truly are my master’s ninth reincarnation! Still, it really has been too long since I’ve last met him... Thinking back, Jaellatra was in chaos back when I last met master... At the time, the

three major Sun Gods of the Sun League had cooperated to deal with master. While the three of them alone weren't too much of a problem for him, things started turning awry when the Youngvigors stepped in. It was quickly made apparent that the Youngvigors and the Sun Gods had planned on joining forces—long before their fight even began—to ensure that master went down! Sadly, their plan worked and they were eventually successful in defeating him!

“Before he left, I was told by master to remain here till ordered otherwise... To think that I'd actually be able to meet with his reincarnated form after all this time! This must truly be god's will!” declared Jade Infused Blade as he released a long sigh.

Following that, Jade Infused Blade suddenly got on his knees... Kowtowing before Gerald, he then cried out, “Please, master! Allow me to return to your side!”

“...That...” muttered Gerald in slight hesitation.

After a bit of pondering, Gerald then added, “...Truth be told, I'm not too sure if I really am Liemis's reincarnated form... However, I do believe that we share the same goal, that being the fact that we're both hoping to reunite Liemis's corpse with Zyla before burying him for good. With that said, I think it'd be best if we kept each other company on our way there!”

“Yes! Thank you for taking me in, master!” replied Jade Infused Blade before quickly kowtowing again.

“Speaking of which, even though I’ve already been here for over a month now, I still have quite a few doubts about a number of incidents, Jade Infused Blade... First off, though you’re a ghost, I can tell that you’ve already attained the rank of a Ninth-rank Chakra King! With that in mind, I wonder if you could share what level of training Liemis had at his peak. I’d also like to know the true level of strength the three major Sun Gods possess!” said Gerald.

“Well, master had managed to enter the legendary Ziyiryon Realm before his demise. He was quite literally a god by that stage, though the three Sun Gods had managed to enter that frightening realm as well. Due to that, they were evenly matched with him.”

“While we’re on the topic, allow me to explain a bit about a legend in Jaellatra. The legend itself goes by the name of The Gareus God, and it revolves around a Gareus Temple. To speed things up, what I essentially wish to share is the fact that five people managed to enter the Ziyiryon Realm.”

“Though the five ruled over Jaellatra, the Sun League always made sure to hide that fact from others. After all, they were allied with the three major Sun Gods, and they, of all people, knew what kinds of cruelty they had done in order to further train themselves. You see, to further their training, they had refined the masculine aura of those who possessed Triton bodies on earth! That’s the reason why master had always been on bad terms with them while he was still alive!” explained Jade Infused Blade.

“I see...” replied Gerald, finally seeing the bigger picture.

So that’s why there existed legends about the Sun League on earth... As it turned out, for thousands of years, those from the Sun League had gone to earth to capture others, just to refine the Triton qi of those people! With that in mind, it now explained that both Peter and Mila had simply been part of that process.

“...And what about the Youngvigors? What else do you know about them? Also, are you familiar with the Quartermains in Jaellatra?” asked Gerald.

Jessica was still in the grasp of the Quartermains, and Gerald wasn’t even sure whether his sister was still alive by this point. The Quartermains had brought so much suffering not only to her, but also his parents and disciples... Just thinking about it infuriated Gerald greatly...

“Well, the Quartermains are one of the major subservient families to the Sun League. With that said, that family has always been seen as an ‘overlord’ of sorts in Jaellatra... Regardless, they were able to move between the three worlds with barely any hindrance since they had the aid of an exceedingly strong person—with the rank of a Diaterra—on their side... That person had first appeared before them

around eight hundred years ago, and just to remind you, the Diaterra Realm is second only to the Ziyiryon Realm...”

“As for the Youngvigors... it pains me to say this, but it was your family in your former life... Back then, even though your title in Jaellatra was Liemis, God of Battle, your real name was Liemis Youngvigor! Regardless, the Youngvigors back then were truly in a detestable state, and it was all because of a single woman by the name of Yadvi Macer... She was master’s love of his life until he eventually fell for Zyla!”

“Yadvi was a vicious woman, and she used all kinds of schemes in order to control both the Divine King Palace as well as the family that my master had founded, the Youngvigors. In fact, she had even cooperated with the Sun League! Had that lying woman not gained master’s trust before poisoning him all those years ago, there was no way he would’ve ended up losing against those three pathetic major Sun Gods! Thankfully, Miss Lockland managed to save him, and for a time, they ran all over the place to seek refuge... Unfortunately, in the end, master still succumbed to that b*tch’s evil schemes! Not only that, but my master’s direct descendants were all taken out by both the Sun League and Yadvi!” explained Jade Infused Blade, his deep resentment as clear as day.

“...Following that, Yadvi was given the title of the Ydite Gods for managing to gain control over the Youngvigors as well as the Divine King Palace. With that in mind, she remains as one of the few major forces left in Jaellatra!”

“As for myself, I was one of the ten guardians of the Divine King Place when I was still alive. Before passing away, I had managed to enter the Sage Realm, and I think that’s the reason why I could still

maintain my spiritual essence past death. Regardless, that b*tch of a Ydite God had also gone after the remaining guardians! While some of them died, a few of them managed to escape her!” explained Jade Infused Blade.

“Either way, master’s entire life was just filled with apprehension... After all, not only was he harmed and plotted against by his first love, but after he was united with his true love, he couldn’t even be together with her for long! That b*tch of a Ydite God used to be the closest person to him! To think that she would harm him that badly...!”

“Liemis...! Your death really wasn’t worth it...!” declared Gerald, a deep fury in his heart. For some reason, after hearing all that Jade Infused Blade had said, Gerald was able to remember glimpses of those incidents... It was almost as though he had experienced those incidents for himself.

Chapter 1595

“Indeed... Speaking of which, may I know why you came here in the first place, master? Also, you said that Miss Lockland is currently in the human world, correct?” asked Jade Infused Blood, still kowtowing before Gerald.

“She is. However, she only exists as a remnant of her soul in that world. Sadly enough, I wasn’t strong enough at the time when the King of Judgment Portal came after us. Since I couldn’t even protect myself yet, Zyla served as a distraction by luring the King of Judgment Portal away. After that incident, I’ve searched far and wide for her on earth. Unfortunately, I found no clues as to where she could have gone! With that in mind, I had a hunch that she could’ve possibly returned to Jaellatra!”

“As for why I’m here, you could say that returning Liemis to Zyla is one of my reasons. The other reason I came here is because my sister’s been captured by the Quartermains! She’s suffering now, so I have to save her! However, in order to even survive long enough, I need to first locate the Primocorose to help me enter the Sage Realm!”

Following that, Gerald sighed before adding, “...Unfortunately, I’ve stopped progressing ever since I entered the Eighth-rank in the Rune Realm. No matter how hard I try, I simply can’t enter the Ninth-realm! If I can’t even get past that, it’ll be useless even if I manage to locate the Primocorose! The Sage Realm must be hundreds of times harder for me to breach!”

This issue had honestly been plaguing Gerald’s mind ever since he stepped foot on this journey.

“It’s best not to grow impatient, Master. I hope you remember that taking the path of training is already going against the natural order. With that said, it’s easier said than done for one to enter the Ninth-rank, though I’m sure you’re already aware of how difficult the hurdle is. To clarify, some people have painstakingly trained for a hundred years, before finally managing to enter that realm! With that said, it’s best that you calm yourself so that you’ll be able to train with greater concentration!” explained Jade Infused Blade.

Upon hearing that, Gerald simply nodded. He understood where Jade Infused Blade was coming from. However, even if he was able to wait for a hundred years, the same couldn’t be said for his sister. Hell, would he even be able to enter the Sage Realm within a century? The thought of it only made Gerald feel more anxious.

“Speaking of which, I just so happen to know where to find the Primocorose, master. I know it’s the main ingredient for you to enter the Sage Realm, so allow me to lead you there! Also, there’s a ten-thousand-year-old pond in this valley. While its water is freezing cold, it’s also a holy place to train oneself! Since we’re heading off anyway, why not try training there? The Herculean Primordial Spirit within your body is a great fortune between heaven and earth. If you manage to completely activate it, breaching the Sage Realm will surely come soon after!” added Jade Infused Blade.

“...Very well! I’ll have to trouble you then, Jade Infused Blade!” replied Gerald, who was honestly delighted to hear that. With that, he clapped his hands together to show his gratitude.

It was about a month later—at the mouth of the Underworld Valley—when one of the Mackowski family’s subordinates could be heard saying, “He’s just a servant, master! We’ve already surrounded the Underworld Valley’s entrance, so once he finally comes out, we’ll be sure to hack him into pieces! With that said, you don’t have to stay here with us in wait for him! We’ll definitely bring his corpse back to you!”

Just as the subordinate had said, Yusef had been lying in wait—with his men at the mouth of the Underground Valley—this entire time. Even though an entire month had passed, Yusef’s resentment had yet to subside in the slightest.

After all, Gerald had tricked him not once, but twice! He was nearly killed by Fezrumoz back then as well! All this was far too humiliating for him! With that, he swore that he would kill Gerald with his very own hands if it was the last thing he did!

“Look, I’m not trying to put you down or anything, but there’s simply no way all of you can defeat him! Just so you know, that young man possesses something very important in his body. After all, despite being so young, he’s already undergone such immense training! With that in mind, I can’t let anything else go amiss! I’ll definitely be killing him personally!” growled the angered Yusef in response.

“...I see... Still, that youth... His endurance really is something else... After all, he hasn’t exited from the valley in an entire month!” muttered the anxious subordinate.

“Humph! From what I can assume, he must have already found the Primocorose! I guess he’s currently just biding his time as he recovers! Even so, he’ll definitely come out sooner or later! After all, most of the Underground Valley is surrounded by a poisonous miasma. With that said, the entrance we’re currently blocking is also the only safe exit for him! As long as we keep waiting here, he’ll surely come out!” sneered Yusef.

The second his sentence ended, Yusef felt his eyelids twitch slightly.

A figure could suddenly be seen walking out of the valley... Squinting his eyes, Yusef ended up bursting in laughter when he finally realized who that person was.

“Hah! And here I thought you died in there or something! So, you’re still alive!” scoffed Yusef as he stared at the slowly approaching Gerald.

“Oh? Do you want me dead that badly?” replied Gerald with a faint smile.

“You... You b*stard! To think you’d just walk out of there so casually!” growled Yusef before revealing a spine-tingling smile.

A second later, however, Yusef found himself slowly raising an eyebrow.

“...So, it seems that I didn’t misinterpret my initial assumption! You really have made a truly massive leap in improvement in only a single month!” muttered Yusef in slight disbelief.

Shaking his head, Yusef then declared, "It appears that if I don't kill you today, you'll surely end up being much stronger than me the next time we meet!"

Chapter 1596

Following that, an explosive sound could be heard!

Everyone could only watch wide-eyed as all the surrounding leaves began gathering in front of Yusuf, specifically in front of his chest...

The leaves then began balling up, and once the orb of leaves was large enough, Yusef bounded forward, using his chest to launch the ball of leaves forward!

At that moment, another explosive sound could be heard as the orb of leaves flew so quickly at Gerald that it was hard to even see it properly!

In response, Gerald positioned his fingers into a sword formation before declaring in his mind, 'Go forth, Storm-Forged Blade!'

Immediately after, Gerald flicked his fingers in the direction of the orb, shooting a blade of light out in retaliation!

Explosion upon explosion ensued as the two attacks flew toward each other... Until finally, the large ball of leaves was sliced clear in two, creating the loudest explosion yet!

Everyone present could only take a few steps back in their shock, utterly stupefied by the sheer amount of power they had just witnessed.

“...What?” muttered the now bewildered Yusef. That boy... how could he have dealt with his strongest attack so calmly?!

“You... You’ve already entered the Ninth-rank of the Rune Realm? How is that possible? When did you even make that breakthrough?!” asked Yusef in his disbelief.

“Only yesterday, to be quite honest. It’s been quite a while since my training halted at the Eighth-rank, you know? To think I’d finally make it through!” replied Gerald with a faint smile.

“You... You couldn’t have managed to do so without external help!” retorted Yusef, still unable to believe all this.

True to Yusef’s words, Gerald had only been able to breach the Ninth-rank of the Rune Realm with the aid of that cold pond. With the stimulus from the pond in addition to the ample holy spirits here, Gerald was truthfully able to get to the next rank rather smoothly.

If he was to be completely honest, even Gerald hadn’t anticipated such rapid results.

Regardless, Gerald really wasn’t too keen on dealing with Yusef at the moment since there were so many people from the Mackowski family present.

With that in mind, Gerald then said, “Apologies, Yusef, but I still have some affairs to deal with. With that said, I’m afraid we won’t be able to determine a winner today! Rest assured, I’ll definitely come

look for you once I'm done with everything! I'll be taking my leave now!"

Following that, Gerald's body seemed to flicker for a moment before disappearing completely!

"After him!" shouted several of the Mackowski family's disciples.

Before they could even make a move, however, Yusef raised his hand before shouting, "Stop! Don't pursue him any further!"

"What? But why, master? Didn't you say we couldn't let him remain alive?" asked a few of his men.

"Humph! If he was alone, I'd surely have dealt with him! However, there seems to be an exceptional person helping that b*stard! None of you may have noticed him, but could sense his presence. With that said, we would have had to deal with two very powerful men—who've both entered the Ninth-rank of the Rune Realm—if we continued chasing him! That's something even I have to admit we won't be able to handle!" grumbled Yusef in a resentful tone as he clenched his fists tightly...

Meanwhile, the snap of whip could be heard within the Quartermain family's mansion located in Jaellatra's Barrio City.

"Hurry up already! If you don't finish what you've been ordered to do in time, I won't be merciful!" shouted a mustached middle-aged man.

Appearing to be a housekeeper of sorts, the man had whipped the woman before him since she was taking a bit too slow just to wash a few vegetables.

Regardless, though the woman was furious, she didn't dare to say a word...

Of course, she was none other than Gerald's elder sister, Jessica...

Chapter 1597

After getting captured by the Quartermains in Jaellatra, Jessica had suffered terribly every single day. Despite constantly being hurt, however, her will remained strong.

She believed that Gerald would definitely come one day to save her from this place. With that in mind, she knew that she needed to survive long enough for him to do so.

Unbeknownst to her, that day would come sooner than expected.

After all, Gerald was already in Jaellatra, and he had even postponed his fight with Yosef since he prioritized saving his sister.

Either way, now that he had entered the Ninth-rank of the Rune Realm, Gerald was pretty much already on his way into entering the Sage Realm. Due to that, he knew he didn't need to be afraid of dealing with the Quartermains anymore. He could now finally save his sister!

It wasn't long before Gerald arrived in Bario City. Now alone and donning a long robe, Gerald slowly made his way across the city's streets.

All along the street, Gerald saw luxuriously dressed people everywhere. As it turned out, those living here appeared to be quite wealthy.

Just as Gerald was passing by two rich young heirs, he heard them say something that instantly caught his attention.

“Say, have you heard? The young master of the Quartermain family is having his birthday party in Featherlight Pavilion!”

“Oh? Then what are we waiting for? Let’s hurry over and have a look for ourselves!”

So, the young master of the Quartermain family was hosting a party, was he? This was excellent!

While Gerald had initially planned on heading straight for the Quartermain’s mansion, now that he had bumped into such a perfect scenario, Gerald was definitely going to allow the young master of the Quartermain family to lead the way for him instead!

Since he was now going with this plan anyway, perhaps Gerald would have a chance to present a little gift to the Quartermains upon meeting them...

Tailing behind the two rich heirs, Gerald then continued thinking about his next step as he followed the duo to the Featherlight Pavilion...

Upon arriving, it was naturally no issue for Gerald to leap past the Pavilion's high walls and enter through the back door. Carefully passing through the large halls without making a sound, Gerald managed to slip past unnoticed all the way to the packed banquet hall.

From what Gerald could see, the crowd consisted mostly of rich heirs in Bario City while the others were simply other prestigious and powerful people.

As he was analyzing the crowd, he heard someone suddenly shout, "Here comes Young Master Yesirn!"

Following that, the luxuriously dressed young master of the Quartermain family, Yesirn Quartermain, walked out from behind a curtain as he stared at the crowd through his sunglasses.

Standing by his side, were two sturdy-looking and dark-skinned men with frigid expressions on their faces. Looking at them, Gerald could already tell that they were Yesirn's personal bodyguards. After all, the duo had to at least have entered the Fourth-rank of the Rune Realm with how strong they were.

Truth be told, Gerald had already noticed that things were different here in Jaellatra. After all, exceptionally strong people seemed to be the norm here, and it wasn't even all that uncommon to see those who had managed to enter the Rune Realm.

This was why Jaellatra was such a mysterious and powerful place.

Regardless, Young Master Quartermain himself was simply a Ninth-rank master. In other words, he hadn't entered the Rune Realm yet. Not that that mattered to Gerald. To him, these people were going to be nothing but corpses sooner or later anyway.

Whatever the case was, Yesirn's appearance made the entire banquet hall fall silent. Nobody there dared to offend the Quartermains, so they simply stared silently at the imposing young master.

Looking at the crowd before him, Yesirn then shouted, "Ladies and gentlemen! Welcome to my birthday party! It's my treat today, so make sure to enjoy yourselves to the fullest!"

Chapter 1598

Upon hearing that, everyone instantly burst into cheer!

Gerald, on the other hand, silently remained low-profile in a dark corner of the banquet hall. To him, today wasn't a day for celebrating Yesirn's birthday. Instead, Gerald saw today as the day of Yesirn's memorial ceremony.

Watching as everyone continued being immersed in the delight of sensual pleasures and drinking, Yesirn didn't even realize that a great danger was about to befall him...

There was a saying that Gerald had previously heard of that suited what he was about to do to a tee. Essentially, 'The end of the party is always the best time for one to get their business done'.

As he thought about that, Gerald made sure that his hood was down before leaping into the air!

It was a second later when everyone present watched as a strong-looking person dropped from the banquet hall's ceiling... before landing onto one of the dining tables!

Shocked by all the noise and the fact that the dining table had been split clean in half, the surrounding guests seated there quickly ran off in fear!

Due to the sudden disorder, the initially joyful atmosphere quickly vanished and was instantly replaced with feelings of tenseness and dread. In a way, everyone could sense that a battle was imminent.

"Who are you? And how dare you crash my birthday party! Are you deliberately trying to court death?!" shouted the new furious Yesirn as he glared at Gerald with murderous intent.

Upon hearing that, Gerald instantly laughed in a rather contemptuous manner before slowly lifting his hood off and revealing how he looked...

"How flamboyant you are, Young Master Quartermain! I can see how much you enjoy being so over the top!" scoffed Gerald.

“Again, who are you?” growled Yesirn as he continued glaring at Gerald.

“My name is Gerald Crawford!” declared Gerald without the slightest hesitation in his tone.

Upon hearing that, Yesirn found himself instantly shocked and surprised. However, his expression quickly turned into one of contempt. To think that the person before him now was Gerald, the wild man who had kidnapped his younger sister, Mila!

“Humph! And here I was thinking who it was! You’re that wild man who kidnapped my younger sister, aren’t you? To think that you actually dared to come to Jaellatra alone! You must truly have a death wish!” sneered Yesirn.

Laughing in response, Gerald simply retorted, “Thank you for pointing out the obvious, Young Master Quartermain! Regardless, the fact that I’m here alone should paint a pretty clear picture that I can easily deal with you without even needing help from others! Now then, listen closely. I’m giving you a chance to order your men to release my elder sister and bring her to me. If you do so, I’ll still make you handicapped, but your life will be spared. If you decide not to comply, however, I’ll be teaching you and the rest of your family a very bloody lesson!”

Despite the fact that Gerald had laughed at Yesirn's words—rather than choosing to be angered—, everyone could feel how murderous each of his words were. From how frigid Gerald's expression was, they knew that his proposal wasn't an empty threat either.

Not only had the Quartermains ruined his brother's eyes and tongue, but they had also broken his parents' legs! As if that wasn't already enough, they even captured his elder sister! All this gave birth to the kind of resentment that couldn't easily be eliminated. In Gerald's eyes, the Quartermains had to be exterminated no matter what. It was that drive to have his revenge that brought him to Jaellatra in the first place!

"You arrogant b*stard! So, you aren't afraid of the Quartermains at all, are you? Just so you know, killing you would be as easy as murdering a chicken!" roared the infuriated Yesirn.

Frowning in slight disdain, Gerald then sneered, "A chicken you say? Very well, then! Let's see who ends up on the chopping board!"

The second his sentence ended, Gerald instantly released his immense murderous intent and all the essential qi that he had been holding back this entire time.

And just like that, Yesirn's anger turned into deep fear. Looking at Gerald now was so pressuring that Yesirn found it hard to even breathe! However, the worst had yet to come.

Due to the intensity of Gerald's essential qi, many of the people around him were instantly afflicted with disruptions in their blood circulatory systems! As a result, those who were too close to him instantly died on the spot!

This, of course, was natural. After all, no ordinary person would be able to resist the essential qi owned by a Ninth-rank Chakra King!

Swallowing down his discomfort, Yesirn then turned to look at his two bodyguards before ordering, "W-what the hell are you two still standing there in a daze for?! Go get him!"

Hearing that, both of the guards instantly began dashing toward Gerald with immense speed!

Seeing that, Gerald simply pushed his palms forward, instantly sending the two guards flying backward from a blast of powerful essential qi!

When the two bodies landed, Yesirn realized that both of them had died there and then. A single blow! That was all it took from Gerald to kill both his strongest guards...!

Now fully aware that he was truly powerless against Gerald, the horrified Yesirn found himself quivering as he slowly took a few steps back while threatening, "S-stay back...! If you dare lay even a finger on me, my family won't even think about sparing you...!"

Though Yesirn knew that his death was imminent, he was still trying to use the Quartermains to threaten Gerald. After all, Gerald had come alone to deal with his family. With him being so reckless, Gerald was sure to be an insensible person that would possibly fall for his threats, right...?

Yesirn's hopes for such a scenario proved that he really was as dumb as a post.

To Yesirn's horror, Gerald then began walking over to him, looking very much like a looming God of Death...

Just as Gerald was about to reach Yesirn, however, he instantly felt an immense murderous aura from behind him as an infuriated voice roared, “Young Master!”

Turning around, Gerald was greeted by the sight of a middle-aged man—donning black martial arts clothing—launching an attack straight for him!

However, Gerald barely even flinched. Instead, he simply tilted his body slightly, successfully dodging that man’s attack with ease!

“Oh! Is that Thunderclap Punch?” asked Gerald rather casually after observing that middle-aged man’s attack.

Thunderclap Punch was a constantly changing attack that was also the most powerful tactic in the Church of the Holy Star. With that said, Gerald honestly hadn’t anticipated that the person now before him could actually perform such a strong attack.

“Humph! So even a b*stard like you recognizes the Thunderclap Punch! Regardless, how dare you disrespect Young Master Quartermain like that! Due to your actions, don’t blame me for vanquishing you!” snorted the middle-aged man as he narrowed his cold, murderous eyes.

Feeling like his hero had arrived, Yesirn then ordered, “M-Mr. Cygan! Kill him! He’s Gerald!”

The middle-aged man went by Miguel Cygan, and he was the guardian of the Quartermain family. With the strength of a Sixth-rank Chakra King, he had come from the Church of the Holy Star, which explained why he was able to perform the Thunderclap Punch in the first place. Regardless, he was considered to be one of the very best within the Quartermain family.

Either way, upon hearing Yesirn’s words, Miguel found himself instantly shocked as he shouted, “What?! So, you’re Gerald? How daring of you to come over to Jaellatra on your own! You must really be itching to join your ancestors!”

Miguel truly hadn’t expected the Quartermain’s enemy to just show up before them like this!

Snorting in response as he looked at the middle-aged man—who was glaring icily at him—Gerald then replied, “What’s there for me to be afraid of? Just so you know, one of my goals of coming here is to exterminate the Quartermains!”

With how determined Gerald’s voice was, it was evident that he wasn’t afraid of Miguel at all. After all, Miguel was nothing but a Sixth-rank Chakra King. He was nothing to Gerald!

“Exterminate the Quartermain family you say? You’ll have to get through me first!” roared Miguel as he clenched his fists so tightly that the veins on his arms instantly bulged.

Following that, Miguel darted forward so quickly that it almost seemed like his shadow had been left behind!

Lifting his hand, Miguel then spread his fingers apart—reminiscent of a clawing motion—as he yelled, “Rising Dragon!”

Staring at the incoming middle-aged man—whose attack made him look like a dragon bursting out from the sea—Gerald simply yelled back in a frigid tone, “Thrusting Dragon!”

Chapter 1600

Following that, Gerald's hands turned as sharp as claws as well!

Before Miguel could even land his attack, Gerald easily grabbed the middle-aged man by the neck before lifting and tossing him to the side!

His neck now bloodied, the heavily injured Miguel slowly got to his knees—with much difficulty—before muttering, "...You... To... think that you... knew how... to use the Thunderclap...!"

With Miguel's blood quite literally gushing out of his mouth now, the dying man wasn't even able to complete his sentence.

However, he did know for a fact that Gerald had used that attack together with the Thrusting Dragon... With that said, Miguel truly hadn't expected Gerald to actually use the skill that he had been so proud of mastering to end his life...

Knowing that he would never be able to redeem himself of this humiliation, Miguel finally gave up, flopping right into his own pool of blood, dead...

After witnessing all that, Yesirn was now so terrified that he almost appeared to be in some sort of trance! Slowly squatting to keep his wildly trembling body balanced, Yesirn found himself thinking, ‘...Not even Miguel, a Sixth-rank Chakra King and a guardian of the Quartermain family was able to deal with Gerald...! With that in mind, who else is there to come save me...?!’

Now that Miguel had been dealt with, Gerald turned to stare at Yesirn before mocking, “Now then... Who else is there to save you, Young Master Quartermain?”

“P-please, Mr. Crawford...! Please, forgive me...! I admit that I was wrong and that I shouldn’t have offended you...! With that said, please be the bigger man and spare me...! I’ll definitely be returning home now to return your elder sister to you...!” begged Yesirn, knowing that there was no other way out for him.

Though Yesirn then crawled over to Gerald’s feet while begging piteously, he was truthfully already thinking about his escape plan. In the end, Yesirn believed that as long as he could reunite with his family, he would surely be able to get some people to deal with Gerald!

Of course, Gerald was able to read through Yesirn’s thoughts like an open book.

'You're a joke, you know that? Don't you realize you're already in my grasps?' Gerald thought to himself.

There was no way in hell that Gerald was going to allow Yesirn to leave... After all, he was going to use him to force the Quartermains to return Jessica to him!

With that in mind, Gerald simply slapped Yesirn tight on his face, not even bothering about anything the young master had just said!

Momentarily flung to the side, Yesirn slowly fumbled to his knees again, his mouth now bloodied and several of his teeth missing. Rather than a young master, Yesirn was now nothing more than a target of scorn.

Regardless, all of the remaining participants of the birthday party—who were still alive—had already fled the Featherlight Pavilion by this point, and many of the pavilion's management team were too frightened to even make a move.

However, there were some sensible people who instantly rushed to the Quartermains to report the incident to them. After all, Young Master Quartermain getting beaten up was a major issue that would surely cause a great uproar within the entirety of Bario City.

Naturally, Gerald had fully anticipated that. With that, he simply stepped on Yesirn's face, applying a bit more pressure as he warned, "Now then... I'll be waiting for your family to come. You'd best hope that my sister is with them once they arrive. Otherwise, your family's going to be greeted by the sight of your fresh corpse!"

Upon hearing that, Yesirn instantly began praying that his family would bring Jessica along. If they didn't, he knew for a fact that Gerald would kill him without a second thought!

It was around ten minutes later when a commotion could be heard outside the Featherlight Pavilion. It was quite obvious to Gerald who was making all that ruckus.

Seconds later, the master of the Quartermain family himself—Henrick Quartermain—came rushing past the pavilion's doors, with many other Quartermains following behind him.

Since Henrick had already entered the Sage Realm, he was a terrifyingly strong person. The fact that his son had been beaten up so terribly only served to further increase his anger and intimidating aura.

While he was initially shocked to find out that Gerald had come to Jaellatra looking for trouble with his family, after hearing what the youth had done to his son, that surprise quickly turned into the urge to hack Gerald into pieces.

Regardless, when Henrick finally saw his son, he instantly roared, "Yesirn...!"

"D-Dad...! Please, save me...!" cried out Yesirn who was still being stepped on.

Seeing how his son was being treated, Henrick's blood instantly boiled as his veins became strikingly visible and his essential qi began flaring wildly. If it wasn't for the fact that his son's head was being stepped on, Henrick really wanted to just go on the attack and kill Gerald on the spot!

Knowing better than to do that, Henrick then pointed at Gerald before threatening, "You'd best release my son, else I'm slicing you into a million pieces, Gerald!"

“Oh? Are you really in a position to threaten me?” scoffed Gerald in a frigid tone as he turned to look at Henrick.

Chapter 1601

The second Gerald’s sentence ended, a crisp ‘crack’ could be heard. Following that, Yesirn’s screams of pain filled the air!

Gerald had just crushed one of Yesirn’s arms, and the excruciating pain that the young master was feeling was evident in his expression.

Seeing that, Henrick’s fury knew no bounds as he glared at Gerald while shouting, “You...!”

“Look, you old b*stard! Your son’s in my hands, and if you want him alive by the end of all this, you’d better hand over my sister! I’m sure you know what’ll happen to him if you don’t comply!” retorted Gerald straightforwardly, not wanting to waste any more time than he needed to with Henrick.

It was clearly a proposal that Henrick couldn’t reject unless he didn’t care about his son, and everyone there knew that.

In response, however, Henrick simply continued pointing at Gerald as he yelled, "Listen here, if my son dies neither you nor your sister will be able to leave Jaellatra alive as well!"

'You're really asking for it, aren't you?' Gerald thought to himself. Rather than feeling afraid, the more Henrick threatened him, the more annoyed he got.

With that, more cracking sounds could be heard, followed by another ear-piercing scream from Yesirn!

"P-please... dad...! Pro- promise him that you'll return her...! I... I don't want to die...!" pleaded the agonized young master.

Seeing his son being tortured so much, Henrick gave it some thought, gritting his teeth the entire time before eventually growling, "...Fine! You have my word that I'll return Jessica to you!"

Understanding that the priority was to keep his son alive, Henrick then turned to face one of his servants

before ordering, "Go bring Jessica over!"

Hearing that, the servant instantly rushed back to the Quartermain family manor to retrieve Gerald's sister.

Before Henrick could say another thing, however, he heard Gerald shout, "You'd better not be playing any tricks on me, you old b*stard! If even the slightest harm comes to my sister, I guarantee that your family will have a bloody price to pay!"

Though Henrick remained silent, he was now more enraged than ever.

To think that he, the mighty and magnificent master of the Quartermain family, would actually be threatened by this inexperienced young man! If word about this got out, he'd surely drown in humiliation!

However, he wasn't too worried about that scenario happening. After all, the second his son was out of danger, he could just kill both Gerald and his sister on the spot! Even if he failed to do so immediately, he was definitely not letting them leave Barrio city unscathed.

It was around ten minutes later when Jessica was led into the pavilion under the guide of two servants...

Upon realizing Gerald's presence, her eyes instantly teared up as she cried out, "Gerald...!"

She knew her younger brother would definitely come save her...!

"Don't worry, sister! Both of us will surely leave this place safely!" consoled Gerald.

Looking at all the scars and injuries Jessica had suffered, her pitiful state only served to fuel Gerald with an even greater wrath. He really wanted to chop all the Quartermains into pieces right now!

Even so, he refrained, knowing very well that the priority was to rescue his sister first. He wasn't going to allow her to sustain any further injuries.

Regardless, upon hearing Gerald's words, Jessica simply nodded slightly. She believed in Gerald, and she knew that they were going to make it out of all this.

Unwilling to further watch the heart-warming scene between the two siblings, Henrick then demanded, "Look, I've brought your sister here, Gerald! Now release my son!"

"Humph! Impatient, aren't we? Release my sister first if you want him back!" sneered Gerald as he glared at Henrick.

Chapter 1602

"You...! Listen here, your sister's still in my grasp! Don't you even dare consider playing any tricks, you hear?!" retorted Henrick as he angrily grabbed Jessica by her neck.

"You old b*stard! One wrong move on my sister and your son will be dead! If you think I'm just joking around, then try me!" roared Gerald as he instantly lifted Yesirn by his neck as well.

When Henrick saw that his son's eyes were already rolling back on his reddened face, the master of the Quartermain family knew that his threats meant nothing to Gerald.

Rather reluctantly, Henrick then released Jessica's neck before replying, "...Fine! Let's exchange our hostages at the same time then!"

Hearing that, Gerald knew that he had to play along. Releasing Yesirn's neck as well, both Gerald and Henrick began slowly walking toward each other, making sure to have a firm grasp on their hostages' backs.

Once they were close enough, the two men released their grasps at the same time, allowing Yesirn and Jessica to begin walking toward the other party...

However, the second the two passed each other, Henrick made a dash toward Jessica! Since his palm was already charged with essential qi, it was obvious that Henrick had planned to do this from the very beginning!

However, Gerald had naturally read Henrick's mind long before this exchange. With that in mind, Gerald was able to instantaneously respond by dragging Jessica over and launching his own palm attack!

What followed was an explosive sound that shook the entire Featherlight Pavilion!

With dust and debris flying all over the place, Gerald used that chance to successfully flee the pavilion together with his sister!

By the time the dust had settled, Henrick realized that he had been outwitted!

His anger was cut short when he heard his servants shouting, "Y-young master...!"

Turning around, Henrick watched as his servants quickly ran over to his son's side... However, Yesirn... He was lying motionless atop a pool of his own blood!

Momentarily frozen in place, Henrick finally snapped out of it when one of his servants turned to look at him before crying out, "M-master...! Young master, he's... He's dead!"

Upon hearing that, Henrick felt as though he had just been fatally struck by lightning.

“Yesirn...!” shouted Henrick as he ran toward his son’s corpse.

Though blood was still flowing endlessly out of Yesirn’s gaping neck, it was evident that the boy was no longer among the living.

As to how that gash had got there, during the earlier moments of chaos, Gerald had ordered Jade Infused Blade—who had been within Gerald’s body this entire time—to momentarily reveal himself and slice Yesirn’s neck! Since nobody there knew about Jade Infused Blade, the deed managed to be done rather stealthily.

Regardless, the now deeply pained Henrick then howled in rage, “I’m tearing off all your skin once I get my hands on you, Gerald...! I’m breaking every single tendon of yours too, and once I’m done, I’ll drink every last drop of your blood...!”

Meanwhile, Gerald was already rushing out of the city with immense speed.

“They... Won’t pursue us, right...?” asked a worried Jessica as she continued clinging onto Gerald’s back.

“Even if they do, I’ll protect you, sister! There’s no need to worry!” reassured Gerald who had already thought about his next move.

Soon enough, both of them arrived at the mouth of the Underworld Valley...

Even from afar, Jessica had already noticed a graceful but nervous-looking woman sitting under a large tree near the mouth of the valley. The person in question was Nori!

After Jade Infused Blade got the Primocorose for Gerald, both of them had decided to momentarily part ways with Nori. Before heading off to Bario city, however, Gerald had told her to wait here for him since he still needed her help with something.

Regardless, upon seeing that Gerald had made a safe return, Nori instantly got to her feet before shouting, "Gerald...!"

Gerald himself wasted no time in handing his sister over to Nori.

"Nori, I still have to deal with those people so I'll be leaving my sister in your care for the moment. Make sure to leave immediately! Also, take this sound talisman. Once I'm done dealing with them, I'll contact you before meeting up again!" instructed Gerald as he took a talisman out from his pocket before handing it to Nori.

Chapter 1603

"Please be careful, alright, Gerald...?" muttered Jessica before her brother parted ways.

She knew how much trouble Gerald had gotten himself into just to save her. With that in mind, she was rather reluctant to see him put himself in danger again now that they had made it out in one piece. If anything terrible happened to him because of her, Jessica was well aware that she would remain guilty about that for the rest of her life...

In response, Gerald simply revealed an understanding smile before saying, "You don't have to worry about me, sister!"

With that, the youth turned around and instantly left...

Not too far away, Henrick was leading several of his men in pursuit of Gerald. Since Henrick had already entered the Sage Realm, his speed was near unimaginable.

Regardless, when Henrick finally saw Gerald—who appeared to be silently standing in place, waiting for his arrival—the master of the Quartermain family found himself roaring, “You’re dying today if it’s the last thing I do, Gerald...!”

Following that, several powerful-looking people leaped out from behind Henrick! From the looks of it, all of them appeared to be either Eighth or Ninth-rank Chakra Kings...

While Gerald wouldn’t have been able to deal with them in the past, things were much different now. After all, he was currently already nearing the end stages of the Ninth-rank of the Rune Realm. With that in mind, Gerald wasn’t afraid of facing those people at all.

What more, he had the exceptional Jade Infused Blade—who was also a Ninth-rank Chakra King—inside his body. Due to that, Gerald was technically not fighting alone this time.

Just as he was thinking about that, a spectral figure flew out of Gerald's body! With a single swipe of his aurablade, Jade Infused Blade easily decapitated all of Henrick's men before swiftly returning into Gerald's body! Nobody else was even able to sense Jade Infused Blade's presence!

Regardless, upon watching his men's heads hit the ground—before slowly rolling to the side like bowling balls—, Henrick couldn't help but shiver slightly in fright. They were all Eighth and Ninth-rank Chakra Kings...! Despite that, Gerald had barely even needed a few seconds to take all of them out!

“...Humph! So, you've already entered the Ninth-rank of the Rune Realm! It appears that I've truly looked down on you! However, know that that rank is useless before me! After all, I've already entered the Sage Realm a long time ago! You, of all people, should know how vastly different that places both you and me! With that said, I can easily just crush your skull!” snorted Henrick rather confidently as he glared at Gerald.

Henrick honestly found it rather unfortunate to have to kill Gerald. After all, the fact that Gerald had managed to enter the Rune Realm at such a young age definitely signified how talented the youth was. In the end, however, Gerald was his enemy and there was nothing he could do to change that.

“Oh? Is that so? You’re free to try and do so then, you old b*stard!” retorted Gerald without the slightest hint of fear in his voice.

While Gerald was fully aware that he hadn’t entered the Sage realm yet, he believed that Henrick wasn’t capable enough to kill him. Due to that, he wasn’t afraid of the Quartermain master.

“You... How arrogant!” shouted Henrick as he dashed forward with inhuman speed! This was how strong someone who had breached the Sage Realm was!

In the blink of an eye, he was already directly in front of Gerald! Aiming for Gerald’s chest, Henrick then struck out his palm!

Of course, Gerald wasn’t about to allow Henrick to do as he pleased. With that, Gerald struck out his own palm in retaliation!

Upon collision, an explosive sound was heard, followed by the ground beneath them forming a rather deep sinkhole from the immense pressure!

As dust and dirt flew in all directions, Henrick couldn't help but feel surprised. He never thought that Gerald would actually be able to fight against him!

While Gerald would've definitely not been a match against Henrick in a one-on-one battle, he actually had Jade Infused Blade on his side. With that in mind, these two individuals—who had both entered the Ninth-rank of the Rune Realm—were just enough to take on Henrick.

Naturally, Henrick was clueless about all this...

Chapter 1604

“So you managed to take my first blow! Very well, then! Let's see if you can take another!” snorted Henrick as he took two steps back.

Following that, Henrick waved his hands slightly before shouting, “Holy Flaring Fist!”

Immediately after, his right fist was set ablaze! Wasting no time, the master of the Quartermains then began charging toward Gerald!

Seeing that, Gerald quickly yelled, "Herculean Armor!"

Sneering at the shield that Gerald had just put up, Henrick then mocked, "Just give it up! There's no way you'll be able to stop this attack!"

A split second later, a thunderous sound ensued as a blazing fire collided against Gerald's shield!

Since the flames were able to bypass Gerald's Herculean Armor, Gerald instantly felt the pain of his skin being burnt! He hadn't expected Henrick's attack to be this powerful! Had Gerald's body not possessed such ample amounts of essential qi, Gerald knew for a fact that the attack could've very easily turned him into nothing but ash!

Regardless, after ten excruciating seconds, the flames finally subsided. By this point, Gerald's clothes were nothing more than thin strips of burnt cloth!

“...How... How is this even possible...?!” shouted the now wide-eyed Henrick in utter disbelief. How was Gerald still alive?!

Smiling contemptuously in response, Gerald then glared daggers at Henrick before retorting, “Is that the best you can do, you old b*stard? What else do you have? Come on, show me!”

Unable to take any more of Gerald’s mockery, Henrick decided that it was high time he took Gerald out with an extremely strong attack!

With his mind made up, Henrick then stomped both his feet onto the ground, causing yet another sinkhole to form around him! His body now engulfed within a raging fire, Henrick then snorted before arrogantly declaring, “You’ll be nothing but ashes once this blow lands, Gerald!”

Pushing his arms forward, Henrick then sent five flaming dragons flying in Gerald’s direction!

“Master, this is bad! That attack is called the Five Blazing Dragons! You won’t be able to withstand it!” warned Jade Infused Blade the second he realized what was happening.

The Five Blazing Dragons was one of the fiery arts in Jaellatra. Once the technique was performed, each following fire dragon would be more powerful than the previous one. With that said, those who bore the same rank as the attacker would most definitely fail to withstand the attack.

Despite the warning, Gerald didn’t buy Jade Infused Blade’s words. After all, the Herculean Primordial Spirit was inside his body!

With that, the five dragons then rapidly flew toward Gerald!

Due to Gerald’s immense speed, he was able to easily dodge the first dragon. Watching as that particular serpent collided against a large tree that was behind him, Gerald found himself frowning slightly when the entire tree turned into nothing but ashes within seconds!

Leaping to avoid the second dragon, Gerald watched as it crashed into a stone wall, resulting in the stones catching fire as the entire wall came crumbling down!

After easily dodging the third and fourth dragon as well, however, Gerald was unable to avoid getting hit by the final one!

Since the fifth fiery dragon was stronger than all the previous ones, Gerald instantly found himself unable to move a muscle the second it collided into him!

Now in immense pain, Gerald—who had been flung high into the air from the impact—slowly began falling into the Underworld Valley's abyss...

Knowing very well that Gerald definitely wouldn't be able to survive such a fall, Henrick found himself breathing a sigh of relief. He had finally avenged his son...

Just to make sure, however, Henrick took a few glances at the bottom of the abyss... Sensing nothing, the Quartermain master then turned to leave, never looking back...

...It was quite some time later when Gerald's fingers began to twitch. Despite falling all the way to the bottom of the Underground Valley's abyss—into what seemed like a meadow of sorts—, Gerald had survived! Even so, the terribly injured youth was still unconscious at the moment...

Chapter 1605

"...Master... Master, please, wake up...!" called out Jade Infused Blade.

He had earlier exited Gerald's body, and after sitting quietly beside the youth for a while, Jade Infused Blade decided to at least try to wake Gerald up.

Watching as the heavily injured youth—whose body was now filled with scars—continued breathing shallowly, Jade Infused Blade could only sigh.

With even Gerald's barrier of essential qi now ruined, it was honestly a miracle that Gerald was still alive. Had it not been for the Herculean Primordial Spirit in his body, Gerald would've perished ages ago...

At that moment, Jade Infused Blade's ears twitched slightly. Following that, he quickly re-entered Gerald's body. Someone was here!

Seconds later, several tree branches began stretching out toward Gerald... Once he was all wrapped up, the branches gently dragged him into a tree hole...

It was about a day later when Gerald's eyes finally opened again... Upon attempting to get up, Gerald instantly began coughing rather violently!

"Hey now, don't go moving around seconds after you've just woken up! Your injuries aren't healed yet! With that said, just lie down and recuperate for the moment!" shouted a deep and almost godly-sounding voice from somewhere...

Upon hearing that, Gerald instantly turned vigilant out of habit. Even after looking around, however, he couldn't seem to detect where that voice had come from.

"...Who's there...?" asked Gerald with a slight frown.

After chuckling heartily, the voice then replied, "I'm a tree spirit that resides in the Underworld Valley! I'm the one who saved you, you know? Regardless, the tree hole you're currently in... It's actually my

body! With that said, in a way, you're now inside me!"

Hearing that, Gerald then instantly said, "I see...! Thank you for saving me, senior...!"

Before he could further express his gratitude, however, Gerald found himself coughing vigorously again.

The moment Gerald realized that there was even blood in his mouth, the tree spirit simply advised, "Look, you're terribly injured at the moment. Go lie down and stop moving about! Understand that your body's barrier of essential qi is slowly recovering! It needs time to fully heal!"

Understanding that the tree spirit's advice was sound, Gerald could only obey his words. After lying down again, Gerald began thinking about how powerful the Five Blazing Dragons attack was. From what he could now tell, the only way he was going to be able to beat Henrick was by breaching the Sage Realm...

"Alright, now that you've settled down a bit and I'm pretty sure that you have nowhere else to go, tell me, how did you suffer such serious injuries?" asked the tree spirit, clearly trying to ease the tension.

“...Well, I had a battle against Henrick, the master of the Quartermain family! After being hit by his Five Blazing Dragons attack, I ended up getting hit by the final dragon! As a result, I fell into the bottom of the abyss...” replied Gerald in a rather shameful tone.

In the end, Gerald was a mighty person who was at the level of a Ninth-rank Chakra King. Despite that, he still ended up getting terribly beaten up and he even fell right into the Underworld Valley’s abyss! With that in mind, Gerald truly felt humiliated by this defeat...

Much to Gerald’s displeasure, however, the second his sentence ended, the tree spirit instantly broke into a roar of laughter!

“The Five Blazing Dragons? You can’t be serious!” scoffed the spirit as it continued laughing for quite a while.

Not expecting the senior to laugh at him like that, the now frowning Gerald then muttered, “Is my loss that funny to you, senior...?”

“Hmm? Oh no, I’m not laughing about you! I’m laughing about Henrick!” replied the tree spirit as he quickly explained himself to avoid any misunderstandings.

Chapter 1606

“Oh? Why is that?” asked Gerald rather curiously

“Well, you see, Henrick hasn’t completed his training on the Five Blazing Dragons attack! He’s still one level short! With that in mind, the only reason you ended up getting this seriously hurt is because he’s already entered the Sage Realm! Though I can see that you’re already nearing the end of the Rune Realm, I don’t think I have to remind you that a Ninth-rank Chakra King and a Sage’s power is still vastly different!” explained the tree spirit.

“...So... that attack wasn’t what hurt me? I only got all these injuries due to our strength difference?” asked Gerald rather quickly.

“That’s right! If you need further proof, being hurt by a fully mastered Five Blazing Dragons attack would’ve definitely reduced you to nothing but dust! The fact that you’re still in one piece says a lot about that!” replied the tree spirit.

“...I see. Still, you appear to know quite a bit about the attack and even Henrick... Who exactly are you, if you don’t mind me asking...?” asked Gerald, sensing that something was amiss.

After all, it was a wonder why a tree spirit would know so much about outside affairs...

“Hmm? Well of course I’d know him well! Henrick’s my junior!” replied the tree spirit with a chuckle.

Upon hearing that, Gerald was instantly stunned.

“What? He’s your junior? But aren’t you...?”

“Ah, just to clarify, I wasn’t always a tree spirit! Back then, I had fought a great battle with Henrick in the Underworld Valley as well! However, due to my carelessness, Henrick found a chance to launch a

completely avoidable sneak attack on me! As a result, I lost the battle... After being tossed into the valley's abyss, my soul somehow got integrated with a tree spirit within this deep valley. With that said, I'll be staying here for a while! However, know that my resentment toward Henrick hasn't diminished in the slightest!" detailed the tree spirit who clearly despised Henrick with a passion.

Quickly putting two and two together, Gerald then asked, "From what you've told me, both you and Henrick share a master, correct? Why did you end up fighting each other? What exactly did Henrick have his eyes on...? Could it be that..."

"I have to say that you're really smart, mister! As you may already have guessed, Henrick was after my Five Blazing Dragons attack! I say 'my' since at the time, I was the only one capable of using it after master imparted it to me. The fact that he wasn't chosen naturally fuelled his jealousy, and since then, he would constantly attempt to obtain the secret scroll of the Five Blazing Dragons—that I kept within me—in order to train for it."

"While he did succeed in the end, I had one last trick up my sleeve! I made sure to hide the last part of the scroll in the deepest parts of my body, which was why Henrick only managed to get his hands on an incomplete scroll!" sneered the tree spirit as he thought about it.

After hearing all that, it explained why the tree spirit knew so much about Henrick and the Five Blazing Dragons. As it turned out, Henrick was the original heir to the attack!

"Again, since he hasn't been able to complete his training for the Five Blazing Dragons attack, I assure you that you were only hurt due to his strength!" added the tree spirit.

"...Understood! Speaking of which, could I have your name...?" asked Gerald, curious about the tree spirit's real name after hearing all that.

"Of course! It's Roman Freeman!"

"It's a pleasure to meet you, Mr. Freeman! I'm Gerald!" introduced Gerald.

“Hahaha! I have a feeling that fate had a role in our meeting, mister! With that said, I’m willing to impart the complete Five Blazing Dragons attack to you on one condition! What do you say?” replied Roman with a subtle smile.

“Go on, Mr. Freeman! I’ll definitely try my best to fulfill it!” replied Gerald, overjoyed that Roman was willing to teach the technique to him in the first place.

Aside from the fact that he was going to master an attack that would surely be able to take Henrick out with ease, Gerald’s enthusiastic reply also stemmed from the fact that he wanted to repay Roman’s kindness for saving him. With that in mind, he was fully ready to agree to any of Roman’s conditions.

Chapter 1607

With Roman’s help, it only took half a day for Gerald’s injuries to be completely healed.

Following that, not only did Roman begin imparting the Five Blazing Dragons skill into Gerald, but the tree spirit also taught Gerald many other martial arts that he had learned throughout his lifetime.

With that in mind, it was obvious that Gerald had agreed with Roman’s terms. As for what the condition itself was, what Roman wanted was quite straightforward, and it was honestly something that Gerald had already been planning to do anyway. In short, Roman wanted Gerald to end Henrick’s life.

Regardless, it wasn’t long before Gerald was able to completely master the Five Blazing Dragons attack. Since the knowledge was imparted into Gerald, Gerald didn’t even need to undergo any training to master the skill. What more, he could now use all the skills that Roman had previously learned!

Now that he had imparted all his skills, Roman's voice boomed one final time in the tree hole as he said, "I've imparted everything that I know into you, Gerald! Now that I've successfully done my part, I can finally retire! I'll be leaving everything to you now!"

And just like that, Roman was gone. Just as his surname implied, Roman Freeman was now finally able to rest in peace, free from everything that had previously held him back...

With that in mind, Gerald knew that his next step was to get rid of Henrick. After all, the sooner he fulfilled Roman's final wish, the better.

Stepping outside the tree hole, Gerald then turned around to look at the towering tree before him... With determination in his eyes, Gerald had a serious expression on his face as he declared, "I definitely won't disappoint you, Mr. Freeman...!"

After giving the tree a deep bow, he then turned to leave...

Not long after, Jade Infused Blade—who had been inside Gerald's body this entire time—said, "Congratulations, master! You've finally entered the Sage Realm!"

As a result of attaining Roman's skills, the Herculean Primordial Spirit within Gerald's body underwent a rapid improvement, allowing the youth to finally breach the Sage Realm.

For a person who had achieved this level of strength, leaping onto roofs and vaulting over walls was nothing. With that in mind, Gerald easily scaled a stone wall before using the top of the wall to propel himself into the air!

Though Gerald wanted to immediately deal with Henrick, he knew that he had to at least meet up with Nori and Jessica first.

If everything had gone to plan, Nori should have brought Jessica to a small town—not too far from the

Underworld Valley—to recuperate for a while, while waiting for Gerald. Hoping that that was the case, Gerald arrived at the small town just a few minutes later.

Seeing that Gerald had returned safe and sound, both Nori and Jessica were instantly relieved. After all, they had been waiting for him for almost an entire day by this point, and both girls had been worried sick throughout that period.

“I’m so glad that you’ve returned safely, Gerald...!” cried out Jessica as she hugged him tightly.

Patting her back, Gerald then consoled, “You, of all people, should know how capable my martial arts skills are, sister... With that in mind, I’d surely return fine no matter what!”

“As much as I’d love to believe that, accidents can happen, you know? If something happens to you, how am I to even answer to our parents...” mumbled Jessica while pouting like a child.

If something bad ever happened to Gerald, Jessica didn’t even know whether she’d still have the will to live or not...

As she thought about that, Gerald turned to face Nori, a gratuitous smile on his face as he said, “Also, thank you for taking care of my sister, Nori!”

“No problem! Though... How do you plan to repay my kindness?” teased Nori in return, a rather interesting smile on her face.

Upon hearing that, Gerald instantly felt slightly awkward. That awkwardness, however, didn’t stem from her beauty. After all, he was a married man and he already had an exceptionally beautiful woman as his wife.

Regardless, Gerald knew that he still owed her one, so he simply suggested, “...Well, let’s just say that I’m indebted to you! How would you like me to repay your kindness? Give it some thought and once

you've made up your mind, I'll agree to one of your requests!"

"Deal! Remember, you were the one who suggested that, so you'd better not go back on your words!"

Chapter 1608

The way Nori had said it, it was almost as though she was afraid that Gerald would end up going back on his word.

Sensing that, Gerald looked at her with determined eyes before saying, "Don't worry, I always keep my word! After all, a person who lies is nothing but a coward!"

Following that, Gerald alternated his gaze between his sister and Nori before adding, "Alright, there's still something I need to settle. With that said, I'm going to have to need both of you to continue waiting for me here for a little while. Don't worry, once I return, we'll leave this place together! Also, remember not to go out all willy-nilly and if needed, you can contact me with the sound talisman. The second it's activated I'll rush back immediately!"

"...What? You're heading off again, Gerald? But where to?" asked Jessica in a worried tone. After all, to think that they had to part ways again so quickly after reuniting!

"Don't worry, sister! I'll definitely make a safe return! Just know that there are still some issues I need to resolve!" replied Gerald as he looked straight into Jessica's eyes.

Upon hearing that, his sister simply nodded slowly... She, for one, knew that there was no use trying to persuade her brother against it. With that in mind, she could only pray that he would return unscathed.

With that, Gerald then made a massive leap before flying back to Bario City at immense speeds...

There was going to be bloodshed tonight, and Gerald was going to make sure that none of the Quartermains would remain...

Meanwhile, the Quartermain family manor was brightly lit, with sheets of white cloth hung everywhere. Adding that to the many death wreaths placed all over the place, it was clear that the Quartermains were holding a funeral for Yesirn.

Henrick himself was standing before Yesirn's memorial tablet. After wrapping white strips of cloth over his son's corpse, the teary-eyed Henrick then said, "I've taken revenge for you, son... Gerald's dead now, so you can rest in peace...!"

Upon hearing that, the rest of the Quartermains present began weeping as well. After all, watching one's child die before their very eyes was most definitely one of the saddest things to witness...

Unbeknownst to them, however, the Quartermains were going to reunite with Yesirn very, very, soon.

At that moment, a booming and rather familiar voice suddenly shouted, "Hey now, you old b*stard! Instead of grieving for him, why don't I just send you to hell so that both of you can get reunited!"

Shocked, everyone turned to look at the source of the voice... And there Gerald was, casually standing with his arms crossed atop the Quartermain manor's roof!

The second Henrick saw the youth, he was instantly hit by immense wrath and shock. Gerald had been hit by the Five Blazing Dragons attack, had he not? How was he still alive?! In fact, how did he even remain so perfectly fine?!

"You... You're alive...?!" growled Henrick as he glared at Gerald.

Snorting contemptuously, Gerald then sneered, “Aren’t you a bit too confident with yourself, Henrick? You weren’t even able to completely master that attack! With that said, there’s no way I would’ve died to that!”

Furrowing his brows, Henrick then gloomily replied, “...How do you even know about that?”

To think that Gerald was aware that he hadn’t perfected the Five Blazing Dragons attack... But how? Nobody else—who was alive—should even know about that!

“There’s no need to know about that. After all, you’re going to be dead soon anyway. As I’ve promised myself, I’m exterminating the Quartermains if it’s the last thing I do!” retorted Gerald in a frigid tone.

Hearing that, Henrick simply snorted disdainfully as he yelled, “You sound rather sure of yourself! If I could defeat you back then what makes you think you’ll win this time?! Now stop talking trash and just die already!”

Following that, the Quartermain master leaped toward Gerald, intent on attacking the youth!

Unfortunately for him, Henrick looking down on Gerald was a truly fatal mistake...

Chapter 1609

Despite seeing that Henrick was launching an attack at him, Gerald hardly even looked anxious.

In response, he simply shouted, “Weakening Strike, the first move of Judge Swift Sword Technique!”

The second his sentence ended, Jade Infused blade exited Gerald's body before transforming into a sword! Upon unsheathing the blade from its scabbard, a blindingly white light then flashed, followed by loud ripping sounds that filled the air!

Now feeling increasingly intimidated, Henrick quickly used his essential qi to block the attack!

As an explosive sound followed, Henrick quickly realized that though he had managed to stop the main attack, the force of it alone still sent Henrick flying toward the ground! Upon collision, the Quartermain head instantly vomited a mouthful of blood...

Coughing as he stared at Gerald in sheer disbelief, Henrick then yelled, "You...! How... How are you even able to perform the Judge Swift Sword Technique?!"

As far as Henrick knew, there was only one person who had successfully mastered that technique... And that person was none other than his old senior, Roman!

Created by Roman himself, the Judge Swift Sword Technique was the other skill that his senior had prided himself in, aside from the Five Blazing Dragons technique.

The sword technique itself consisted of three separate moves, with the first being Weakening Strike, the second called Glistening Star Strike, and the final one named the Judge Swift Strike!

Regardless, by right, the Judge Swift Sword Technique should have disappeared together with Roman... After all, Henrick had made sure to finish off his senior before tossing him into the Underworld Valley's abyss.

With that in mind, the fact that the technique still existed was a great shock to Henrick.

“How, you ask? Well, let’s just say that I’m fully aware that you’re vicious enough to not even spare your senior! With that said, I’m going to be executing the principles of your sect on behalf of Roman today!” sneered Gerald contemptuously as he casually pointed the sword at Henrick.

At that moment, Henrick swore that he could almost see his senior standing where Gerald was...

“...To think that you had been alive this entire time, senior...! You even imparted all your skills into this person! Still, I hope you realize that I’m much stronger than I was back then!” grumbled Henrick as he quickly got to his feet.

Following that, Henrick spread both his hands out... and seconds later, his entire body was set ablaze! With a fiery dragon now wrapped around his body, it was clear that Henrick was about to use the Five Blazing Dragons technique!

Gerald, however, simply replied, “Just saying, but you haven’t really mastered that technique yet. You know, in case you’ve forgotten.”

“So what of it? Allow me to remind you that the secret scroll of the Five Blazing Dragons is still with me! With that said, this incomplete attack is still sufficient in ridding you for good!” scoffed Henrick confidently, clearly unaware that Gerald had not only mastered that very attack, but had also entered the Sage Realm!

“I see... Well, since you’re holding onto that incomplete attack so obstinately, I’ll show you how it’s really done before you die!” replied Gerald who couldn’t be bothered with any more of Henrick’s nonsense.

With that, Gerald then did the same gestures as Henrick had... Just like his opponent, Gerald’s entire body was then engulfed within flames! However, unlike Henrick, Gerald’s flames were golden! Following that, two dragons appeared, one made of fire and the other made of golden light! Coiling around each other, both individual dragons were more dazzling than what Henrick’s dragons could ever achieve.

“What?!” yelled the deeply astonished Henrick as his eyes widened. This... This was the fully mastered Five Blazing Dragons technique...!

“Take a good, long look at what the fully mastered Five Blazing Dragons technique looks like, Henrick!”

Chapter 1610

After Gerald declared that, a furious roar could be heard as the youth summoned five fiery dragons, each shining in blindingly golden light! However, Gerald wasn't done.

Following that, all five dragons merged to form a blast of fire and light that then shot out toward Henrick!

Unable to avoid the attack, Henrick was instantly turned to ashes the second the flames engulfed him!

Though the rest of the Quartermains were instantly terror-stricken, they barely had any time to react as the attack began aiming for them as well! Soon enough, the entire manor was set ablaze, and all that remained of the Quartermains were their ashes...

This was the true power of the finalized Five Blazing Dragons... Everything within thirty feet of it would simply crumble!

Regardless, now that the Quartermains had been completely eliminated, Gerald began making his way out of Bario City.

While he was glad to have helped Roman fulfill his dying wish, Gerald was well aware that news of the Quartermain's extermination would surely spread like wildfire throughout Jaellatra.

With the public in chaos, it definitely wouldn't take long for the forces who had initially been backing the Quartermains up to have their revenge.

Though Gerald had already entered the Sage Realm, Gerald understood that there were many other exceptional people within Jaellatra. With that in mind, staying there for any longer would surely spell trouble. Due to that, Gerald knew that he had to leave with Jessica as soon as possible.

With the plan all set, Gerald then left Jaellatra with Jessica early the next morning.

While Nori chose to return to Earth Capital on her own, she made sure to remind Gerald that he owed her one before he left. She also added that when a suitable time came, she would surely call for his help.

Regardless, true to what Gerald had predicted, chaos ensued all across Jaellatra not long after he and Jessica made their escape.

After all, the Quartermains were a greatly famous and reputable family in Jaellatra. They were also known to be extremely strong. With that in mind, the fact that they had been taken out in a single night was definitely stupefying...

It was sometime later when a person wearing a phoenix robe and a golden crown could be seen sitting atop a throne within the God Temple of Jaellatra... Holding a scepter with dragon carvings all over it, the person went by the name of Apollo, and he was the king of the God Temple. Apollo was also the ruler of all of Jaellatra, and he had attained the Seventh-soul-rank within the Sage Realm...

At that moment, a man donning a black cape ran in before respectfully saying, "God Lord, the Quartermains have been completely eliminated! Due to that, I believe that a few of Jaellatra's forces will begin causing trouble in their attempt to snatch the previous turfs that the Quartermains owned!"

The person speaking—who had attained the Second-soul-rank in the Sage Realm—went by the name of Hisham, and he was one of God Lord’s followers.

“I see... Do we have the culprit?” asked Apollo in a slow but deep voice. His commanding tone alone was enough to send shivers down one’s spine...

“We do! The one responsible for all this is a youth by the name of Gerald! According to what I’ve gathered, he appears to be from Earth!” replied Hisham.

“From Earth, you say... Very well. From this moment onward, you’re tasked with heading there and testing that person’s strength out! Once you’ve done sufficient tests, come back and report the results to me!” ordered Apollo before closing both his eyes.

“Yes, God Lord!” replied Hisham as he cupped his hands in obeisance before leaving immediately.

Not even bothering to open his eyes again, it appeared that Apollo had little interest in Gerald...

Regardless, it didn’t take long for all the Quartermain family’s turfs to be snatched and divided among the other families in Jaellatra, leaving the Quartermains nothing but a distant memory...

By that point, Gerald and his sister had already made their safe return to Earth...

Upon reuniting her with their family, Gerald’s parents—and Yoel—were instantly overjoyed to find out that both of them had returned in one piece. Their family was finally together again!

While the occasion was certainly joyous, Gerald knew that things were far from over. After all, though the Quartermains in Jaellatra were no more, the Quartermains in Sunniva City—the Quantocks—were still alive, and Gerald was well aware that both families were connected by the same sect and bloodline...

Truth be told, this entire incident began from the actions of the Quantocks, and they were also responsible for sending his sister to the Quartermains. With that in mind, Gerald definitely had to take out the Quantocks next...

Chapter 1611

It was late that night—within a secret manor in Yanam—when Gerald and his family could be seen cheerfully eating while talking with each other.

Even Yoel—whom Gerald's mother was currently supporting—found himself smiling due to how joyous the reunion was. It truly had been ages since they had last gotten together like this...

Even so, Gerald couldn't seem to feel truly happy about all this. After all, in the end, poor Yoel still had his eyes gouged out and his tongue snapped! His parents no longer had functioning legs either, and as for his sister... He couldn't even imagine all the suffering she had gone through while waiting for him...

To Gerald, all this had only happened due to him not doing his best to keep his family protected. With that in mind, he blamed himself for all their suffering, and all that guilt prevented him from enjoying himself at the moment...

If only he had made a few more precautions, Yoel would've surely been able to live both normally and happily like any regular person... However, Yoel had actively tried to defend his family, and as a result, he ended up in such a pitiful state... It truly made Gerald feel like he had failed his brother...

With all these thoughts plaguing his mind, Gerald knew that he would only be able to rest easy once he took down the Quantocks. That was the only way Gerald was going to be able to fully avenge his family...

Gerald's train of thought was cut short when his smiling mother turned to look at him before saying,

“Gerald... You seem a little quiet tonight...”

“She’s right! Our family’s finally reunited again, you know? Be a bit more joyous!” added Dylan.

Upon hearing that, Gerald instantly forced a smile to hide his troubles.

A short while later, however, he took in a deep breath before turning to look at his family with determined eyes...

“...Mom, Dad, Jessica, and Yoel... From today onward, I’ll never allow any of you to suffer any more pain...! I’ll protect each and every one of you no matter the costs!”

“Well said! We believe in you, Gerald!” replied Dylan as he nodded with a smile.

With that said, the laughing and talking continued late into the night...

Eventually, Gerald’s parents and Yoel headed off first to retire for the night. Watching as his parents led Yoel away, Gerald then sat in the garden with Jessica to continue talking for a bit.

“I wonder if you remember the time when you first realized that you were a rich heir, Gerald...” asked Jessica with a smile as she stared at the shining stars in the night sky.

Smiling subtly, Gerald then replied, “Of course I do! Thinking back, all of you were truly experts at hiding all that from me! Do you even have any idea how long I suffered from how poor I was?”

“We did all that for a reason though! By making you experience all that, we had hoped that it would make you strong enough to eventually be able to continue carrying our family’s torch! And lo and behold, look at you now! With you to rely on, dad can finally retire from being our family’s backbone... Honestly, by this point, I don’t really care that much about you making a huge impact on society...”

Instead, I just wish that our family can live together cozily!” said Jessica with words that came from her heart.

Turning to look at his sister, Gerald then lowered his head before replying in an apologetic tone, “...You must have suffered terribly while you were captured, sister... I’m sorry for being so careless! Had I made more precautions, neither of you would have ended up in such pitiful states!”

Upon hearing that, Jessica gently patted Gerald’s head before saying, “None of us blame you for all this, Gerald... After all, you couldn’t have possibly anticipated all this to happen! I understand that you badly wish to protect us since we kept protecting you back then, but understand that you’re already doing a good job! After all, we’re all together again now, aren’t we? With that said, let bygones be bygones and let’s enjoy our time together as a family to the fullest!”

“...I understand, sister...” muttered Gerald as he nodded in response...

At that very moment, a dark silhouette suddenly dashed past the forest right outside the manor...

Chapter 1612

Though the silhouette was extremely quick, Gerald was still able to see it through the corner of his eye... Realizing that they weren’t alone, Gerald had a gut feeling that the person or thing dashing about was up to no good.

Not wanting Jessica or his parents to know about the figure’s presence—and potentially get worried or scared—, Gerald then quickly said, “You know, it’s getting a bit late, wouldn’t you say? You should go ahead and get some rest first, sis!”

“I guess... Don’t stay up for too much longer yourself, Gerald!” replied Jessica as she smiled warmly

before returning into the manor.

Once he was sure that she had entered, Gerald instantly leaped out of the manor and headed to the spot where he had last been able to sense the shadowy figure's presence. Upon arriving at the spot, Gerald stopped in his tracks before activating his holy sense to scan the area...

After standing there in silence for a while, Gerald eventually looked up at the trees surrounding him before shouting, "Come out already! I know you're close by!"

Almost immediately after, the rapid rustling of leaves could be heard as the silhouette from before dashed out from one of the trees!

Noticing that it was charging toward him with a blade that glinted coldly in the moonlight, Gerald instantly stepped aside to dodge the attack before attacking his assailant with his right palm!

By the end of it all, both of them managed to successfully launch their attacks, though neither of them got hurt...

"Who are you?" asked Gerald in a frigid tone.

"To think that someone at your age would be able to enter the Sage realm... What a promising future you show! Regardless, at the rate of how fast your strength is growing, I have little doubt that you'll be able to destroy the Quantocks with ease!" replied the slightly surprised person in a rather devilish tone.

Squinting his eyes, Gerald then glared at the man in black as he said, "Again, who are you? If you're worthy enough then you should identify yourself as well as your intentions outright!"

"Hah! The truth is, you're the one who isn't worthy enough to know my identity yet! Regardless, I'll at least let you know that I was sent here under the orders of God Lord!" replied the man with a snicker.

Before Gerald could even ask him about any more details, the man in black bolted off! And just like that, his presence was completely undetectable, gone in the dark of night...

Shortly after, Gerald heard Jade Infused Blade say from within his body, "Master, that man was strong...! He had to at least have entered the Second-soul-rank of the Sage Realm!"

"...I see. Tell me, Jade Infused Blade, do you have any idea who that 'God Lord' that mysterious man mentioned is...?" asked Gerald rather curiously.

"I haven't heard of him before, though from what I can guess, he must be from Jaellatra!"

So, it was just as Gerald had predicted... Quite a stir must have taken place following the death of the Quartermains... The fact that this man had come all the way from Jaellatra to meet him was already a clear sign that more trouble was imminent.

"Still, I could sense that that man wasn't trying to fight you, master... From what I could see, it seemed like he was just trying to test your abilities!" added Jade Infused Blade.

Gerald had assumed that as well. After all, the man hadn't tried to do anything particularly fatal to him.

Understanding that there was a possibility that he was simply being tested, Gerald had made sure not to show too much of his capabilities earlier. Due to that, hopefully the man didn't manage to gather too much data.

"Well, if I want to know more about this, I guess I'll just have to look for this 'God Lord' and ask him myself!" muttered Gerald to himself as he casually looked in the direction where the man in black had run off to...

Chapter 1613

Meanwhile, the sound of a cup shattering to pieces could be heard within a manor in the far-off city of Sunniva...

The one who had furiously done the deed was Zaki Quantock, the head of the Quantock family...

Despite there being several other Quantocks who had witnessed the scene, all of them simply lowered their heads, not even daring to say a word or look Zaki in the eye out of fear that he would take his anger out on them...

“That utter b*stard...! I’ll definitely shred you to pieces, Gerald Crawford...!” roared the enraged Zaki, immense fury reflected in his eyes.

The extermination of the Quartermains in Jaellatra had caused a massive stir among his family here. To think that Gerald would actually be bold enough to do such a thing!

“...Father, what... should we do now...?” asked Shawn Quantock—a middle-aged man who was Zaki’s eldest son—in a careful tone as he walked up to Zaki.

“Come again? What do you mean what should we do? We’re definitely making Gerald pay for all he’s done!” retorted Zaki, his eyes glinting icily. From his look alone, it was obvious that he already had something in mind to deal with Gerald...

It was sometime later in the dead of night when Zaki could be seen discussing something with three elders who were all donning grey suits.

Standing within the hall, Zaki turned to look at one of the elders before saying in a heavy tone, “Yamazon, I’m sure you realize that the Quartermains being wiped off the face of the earth is something extremely serious. With that said, I have no choice but to ask for your help to avenge the Quantocks!”

Yamazon was from the holy mountain of Jaellatra, and he was strong enough to have attained the Second-soul-rank in the Sage Realm. With that in mind, it was no wonder why he was given the title of second master of the holy mountain. Aside from that, he was also the main backbone of the Quartermains. Due to that, he was definitely involved with the protection of the Quantocks as well.

“Indeed, leader Quantock. It shames me that the Quartermains were eliminated despite being under my holy mountain’s protection within Jaellatra. With that said, I’ll surely avenge them!” replied Yamazon in a casual but domineering tone.

“I’m glad to hear that! With the help of all three of you, that b*stard will surely end up dead in no time!” declared Zaki, a satisfied smile on his face. Gerald would surely die this time!

After all, the other two elders—who went by the names of Xander Yonda and Jones Curie—were also guardians of the holy mountain, and both of them had managed to enter the First-soul-rank of the Sage Realm.

With masters who had attained the first and second soul ranks within the Sage Realm, Zaki was confident that Gerald would be no match against them...

Following that, Zaki told the trio where to find Gerald. Upon getting that information, all three of them nodded before leaping at the same time, disappearing into thin air as they readied themselves to finish Gerald off, once and for all!

Fast forward to the next morning, Gerald could be seen meditating in the garden. Waking early and meditating had become a habit for Gerald since it allowed him to better concentrate on the power of the Herculean Primordial Spirit, hence allowing his control over it to become stronger as the days went by.

However, it wasn’t long after Gerald began his daily meditation when he suddenly sensed murderous intent in the vicinity! He could also sense that it was now rapidly approaching him with such power that it couldn’t be underestimated.

As the sword that had come flying toward him grew dangerously close, Gerald opened his eyes before quickly extending his essential qi-filled palm toward the weapon's direction!

With a simple gesture, the sword—that had momentarily frozen in place mid-air—snapped right in two!

After it clattered to the ground, three figures instantly flew in from outside the manor! Landing quite a distance before Gerald, the three people were—as expected—Yamazon and the other two elders.

Staring at the trio with a raised brow and a darkened expression for a while, Gerald then casually asked, "I'm assuming the Quantocks sent you here?"

Chapter 1614

Sneering at Gerald's casual response, Yamazon then retorted, "Even if the Quantocks themselves don't come for you after you destroyed the Quartermains, we sure as hell will! Cutting straight to the chase, we're here today to end your life as revenge for the extermination of the Quartermain family!"

Yamazon's tone was frigid, and the furious aura he released was nothing short of pressuring.

"...What? Are only three of you here to do the deed?" asked Gerald rather disdainfully as he alternated his gaze among the three.

"You're no prize, lad! The three of us are more than enough to finish you off!" retorted Yamazon with a snicker before the murderous man made his move!

It barely took a split second for Yamazon—who had been quite a distance away—to appear right in front of Gerald! This was how powerful someone from the Sage Realm could get!

Even so, Gerald had already entered the Sage Realm as well, so he wasn't going to get caught by Yamazon that easily. Still, he knew he had to distract the trio away from the manor first to avoid his family getting hurt.

With that in mind, he decided to lead the trip to a more spacious area to fight.

“Heh, big deal! Let’s see if you can even catch up to me first, old man!” scoffed Gerald as he leaped out of the manor.

Seeing that, Yamazon and the other two guardians immediately began chasing after him. They weren’t about to let him escape!

Gerald himself—who was now quite far from the mansion—snuck a few glances back and was relieved when he saw that the trio were taking the bait. He could at least ensure that his family would be safe now.

It wasn’t long after before all of them arrived at a spacious area. Thankfully, Gerald managed to find someplace remote so that outsiders wouldn’t be able to bump into them mid-fight and accidentally get hurt.

“That’s quite enough running around, you brat! Not like you can outrun us for long! After all, I’ve attained the strength of a Second-soul-rank master in the Sage Realm!” scoffed Yamazon as the trio surrounded Gerald.

Laughing in response, Gerald then stared at Yamazon before casually replying, “Outrun? Look, I only came all the way out here so that you wouldn’t ruin my house! After all, you won’t be able to compensate me once you’re dead!”

“How arrogant...! I’m crushing you to bits if it’s the last thing I do!” roared Yamazon as he charged straight for Gerald, his mind only filled with thoughts of murdering the youth!

“I’ll just break all your bones before you can do so, then!” retorted Gerald, not wanting to show any signs of weakness.

Upon hearing that, Yamazon was so enraged that he made sure to intensify his force as he got dangerously close to Gerald!

To the old man's shock, however, Gerald easily countered his attack with a single kick! As Yamazon found himself momentarily soaring in the air, the elder eventually crashed onto the ground, prompting his entire body to produce several sickening sounds of bone snapping...

And just like that, with every single bone in his body broken, Yamazon was dead.

"To think you'd even dare to seek revenge on me when you're that weak! What a joke!" scoffed Gerald as he pointed at the fresh corpse...

Chapter 1615

After taking the other two out as well, Gerald began thinking of his next step.

From this encounter alone, Gerald knew that he had to head off to Sunniva City as soon as possible to destroy the Quantocks...

After thinking about it a bit more, Gerald then fished his phone out and dialed the number of Hubert Younger from the Dragon Squad... Whatever his next move was, he still needed someone to deal with these corpses first.

Hubert definitely didn't have any objections to Gerald's request, and about half an hour later, Hubert's men arrived to take the bodies away...

With that out of the way, Gerald couldn't help but sigh rather unhappily. After all, he had been enjoying a rather good morning before Yamazon and his goons came along... Still, his family remained safe, so it wasn't all that bad.

Regardless, now that the issue was settled, Gerald hurried back to the manor...

Upon arriving, Gerald realized that his family members were already awake. Since there were already plenty of designated servants to take care of all the necessary tasks within the manor, his family members were pretty much just sitting around idly in his parents' room.

Understanding that this was a chance as good as any to discuss things with them, Gerald looked at each of them before saying, "Dad, mom, sis, and Yoel! There's something important I need to talk to you about and I was wondering if I could hear your opinions on it!"

Smiling back at his son, Dylan then replied, "We're all family, Gerald! Speak your mind!"

"Alright, so essentially, I'm thinking of arranging for all of you to stay in Sacrasolis Palace. Not only is that place much safer than out here, but Mila will also be there to take care of you!" explained Gerald.

While this place was much quieter, the fact that Yamazon and his men were still able to locate them made Gerald increasingly worried about his family's safety. After a bit of thought, Gerald eventually concluded that the Sacrasolis Palace truly was the safest place for them to live in. Mila would be there to take care of their needs as well.

Either way, neither of them had any objections with the idea, so Dylan simply replied, "That sounds good, Gerald! Let's go with that!"

Naturally, all of them understood that they were merely sitting ducks in the eyes of Gerald's enemies. With that in mind, as long as they could make Gerald worry less, they had no problem with following whatever Gerald arranged for them. Besides, it would also ensure that their family would at least remain together no matter what.

"I'm glad to hear that! I'll be transferring all of you to the Sacrasolis Palace later then!" said Gerald with a nod.

At noon, all of them set off in a car for Sacrasolis Palace.

On the way there, Gerald thought about Master Ghost and all the other members of the Dragon Squad that had been posted at Sacrasolis Palace. As long as nobody from the Sage Realm tried to trespass into his base, he believed that his family would remain relatively safe from harm... People who hadn't entered the sage realm wouldn't be stupid enough to invade his base anyway.

Regardless, upon returning, Mila instantly embraced her husband, overjoyed to see him back in one piece. Her joy was warranted since every time Gerald headed off, Mila would get worried sick and constantly pray for Gerald's safe return.

Either way, after things settled down a bit, Gerald turned to hand a few sound talismans to Mila before saying, "I'll be leaving Yoel and my parents in your care for the moment, Mila. I still have some things to attend to, and it may take a while before I return. With that said, use these sound talismans if there's anything you need to tell me!"

Knowing how heavy Gerald's responsibilities were, Mila simply nodded. Though she couldn't help him directly, she could at least fulfill any requests he asked from her. In order to prevent Gerald from bearing any more worries than he had to, Mila understood that she had to be the strongest woman that she could be in front of him.

With that said, Gerald then quickly left for Jaellatra again with two things in mind...

Chapter 1616

The first reason he was returning there was to find out more about the God Lord that the man in black had previously mentioned...

Secondly, he wanted to buy a few secret technique talismans.

While secret technique talismans were common in Jaellatra, they were all generally rather pricey. It definitely didn't help that the ones Gerald wanted were of the rarer variants...

Quite honestly, Gerald had previously thought about learning how to make talismans. In doing so, he would surely be able to save up quite a bit.

Even so, Gerald was aware that talisman making was a very challenging skill to master. With barely any time or energy to spare for that, Gerald simply put the thought aside for now.

Regardless, after flying for about an hour, Gerald arrived at Jaellatra without a hitch. Now that this was his second time here, Gerald no longer found the place to be unfamiliar. In fact, he was able to gather his bearings rather easily, and he could get to the places he wanted to—within the city—quite comfortably.

Either way, it didn't take long for Gerald to arrive at the Zahn family's residence. Naturally, he was here to look for Nori Zahn.

Nori had the Zahn family as her backer in Jaellatra, and the Zahns were a considerably prestigious family here. As for why he came looking for it, it was only the natural choice since Nori was the only person he knew in Jaellatra.

Regardless, Gerald was promptly stopped by two guards—who were standing guard in front of the Zahn manor—when they saw him approaching the Zahn family manor's gates.

"Good day, may I know who you're looking for?" asked one of the guards.

"Good day. I'm a friend of your eldest young lady and I've come over to visit! If she's home, could you tell her that Gerald Crawford is here to meet her?" replied Gerald with a cheerful smile.

"Apologies, but the young lady has gone out!" said the same guard from before.

"Gone out? Do you have any idea where she went...?" asked Gerald.

“I’m afraid not, and the same probably goes for him... In the end, we’re just guards of the family! We have no right to know the affairs of the young lady!”

Upon hearing that, Gerald simply nodded. There was no reason for the guards to lie to him, so he may as well just head off into the city to try looking for her. With any luck, he’d manage to bump into her...

Still, this girl truly had the worst of timing... To think that she wouldn’t be home when he finally found the time to come meet her again!

Either way, Gerald soon found himself walking along the busy streets of Earth Capital alone...

While looking around, Gerald had to admit that this place was far more magnificent compared to any place on earth. With that said, it really was no mystery why Jaellatra was so much richer than earth.

Regardless, Gerald’s train of thought was cut short when he suddenly heard someone saying, “Please, Nori! I’m being sincere here, so please just accept me!”

Turning to face the source of the voice, Gerald watched as a man donning a white suit walked out of a luxurious restaurant while desperately pleading to an unimpressed woman who was trying to walk away from him.

It was evident that the woman wasn’t interested in him at all, and after closer inspection, Gerald was able to discern that she truly was the Nori that he was looking for! To think that he would actually manage to locate her!

Since she looked like she was currently in a pickle now, Gerald hesitated for a moment before calling out, “Nori!”

Upon hearing that familiar voice, Nori instantly turned to see if it really was him... Upon realizing that it really was Gerald, her eyes instantly glinted with joy as she exclaimed, "Gerald!"

Following that, she quickly ran toward him before embracing him tightly!

Gerald was completely caught off guard by this. After all, this was the last thing that he could have expected Nori to do! Whatever the case was, he was still a married man...

Chapter 1617

With that in mind, Gerald quickly got the girl off him.

In response, the surprised Nori then asked, "Why have you returned, Gerald? And why didn't you tell me that you were coming back in advance?"

"I did try to look for you, but your guards told me that you had gone out! Due to that, I came over here to see if I would have any luck finding you!" explained Gerald.

Upon hearing that, Nori was instantly overjoyed. After all, she had missed Gerald dearly ever since they parted ways. She had also been bored out of her mind since then.

Regardless, upon seeing how intimate Nori was being with Gerald, the young man in white furiously stomped over to them before asking, "Who is he, Nori?"

Glaring back at the man in white, Nori then said in a cold tone, "He's my boyfriend, Johnie Lager! With that said, you'd best stop pestering me or he'll teach you a good lesson!"

Gerald himself could only frown when he heard Nori's claim. This woman was far too proficient in using others as her shield...

"...Sorry, but I'm not her boyfriend!" denied Gerald, not wanting to be taken advantage of that easily.

Hearing that, Nori turned to glare at Gerald next, annoyed by his insensitivity. After all, wasn't it obvious that she was just trying to rid herself of Johnie?

Either way, the angered young man went by the name of Johnie Lager, and he had been pursuing Nori for the longest time. To his dismay, Nori didn't seem to like him at all, and she seemed reluctant to even look at him! Though it made him deeply upset, her actions only served to fuel his need to make her his.

Ignoring Nori's glares, Gerald—who very much preferred not to cause any unnecessary misunderstandings—then added, “Whatever the case is, it appears that you have some things to attend to at the moment, Nori. With that in mind, we can find someplace to sit and talk once you're done settling things!”

Just as Gerald was about to walk away, however, the now nervous Nori instantly reached out to wrap her arms around Gerald's!

As if she was going to let him off that easily when he had come with the specific intent to meet her! Besides, he still owed her one!

Making sure to press her bosom against Gerald's arm, Nori then whispered, “Don't forget that you still owe me a favor, Gerald! Look, this man is extremely troublesome! If you pretend to be my boyfriend and help me get rid of him, I'll consider that favor to be accomplished!”

When she put it that way, Gerald could only silently agree. After all, he was a man of his words.

Understanding that Gerald's silence signified his approval, Nori then turned to face Johnie before putting on a stern expression as she warned, “Look, Johnie, I'm busy at the moment, so please stop pestering me! I already have a boyfriend, as you can see, so know that you and I won't ever be a thing! Now, goodbye!”

Upon hearing that, Johnie instantly felt humiliated. He was the young master of the Lager family... The

fact that the woman he loved was being snatched away from him right before his eyes was nothing short of disgraceful!

After a short pause, Johnie pointed at Gerald before growling, "...You there! What's your name? I'm challenging you to a duel!"

Raising a brow in response, Gerald couldn't help but feel that Johnie was rather ignorant. After all, he was still unwilling to let go of Nori even though she had explicitly rejected him.

Snorting disdainfully, Nori simply glared daggers at Johnie as she retorted, "Are you seriously challenging my boyfriend to a duel, Johnie? With how weak you are, a single pinch from him is enough to kill you!"

Hearing that, Johnie was instantly infuriated! Wasn't Nori looking down on him too much? In the end, he was still a Ninth-rank Chakra King!

"Listen here, kid! If you don't accept my challenge today, I definitely won't be allowing you to leave this place alive...!"

Chapter 1618

Now already seeing Gerald as his target, Johnie no longer cared about Nori's humiliating words.

While Gerald hadn't really wanted to get too involved with this man in the first place, after hearing Johnie's threats, Gerald found that this was as good a time as any to teach the youth a lesson.

'So, he appears to be a fearless lad who won't cry till he sees his own coffin! Well, since he probably won't back down till he achieves his goal anyway...'

"Are you really sure you wish to fight me alone?" asked Gerald in a cold voice as he turned to glare at

Johnie.

“Stop talking crap and accept the duel already! Know that if I win, you’ll have to leave Earth Capital by crawling all the way out!” scoffed Johnie as he glared back at Gerald.

“That’s fine by me, but what if you lose?” asked Gerald as he flashed a wry smile.

“Humph! As if I’d ever lose to someone like you!” scoffed Johnie confidently. He had assumed that Gerald was simply no match against him, which was why he was being so disrespectful toward him.

“That doesn’t answer my question. Regardless, if you lose, you’ll give me a hundred million dollars. Is that acceptable?” asked Gerald after thinking for a bit.

Naturally, Gerald wanted to use his winnings on the talismans he was planning on buying. After all, why use his own money when he could use Johnie’s? Spending other peoples’ money was much more fun anyway.

“Fine by me!” replied Johnie without the slightest hesitation. He came from a wealthy family, after all, so that amount was nothing extraordinary to him.

Regardless, Nori wasn’t about to stop Gerald from doing whatever he wanted to. After all, she knew his capabilities well, and she was more than certain that Johnie was going to end up losing and paying Gerald all that money.

Whatever the case was, both of them eventually found a wide space to duel in. Upon arriving there, Johnie took his jacket off before stretching his neck and starting to warm up.

Gerald himself simply stood there, watching Johnie calmly.

While Gerald was honestly glad that this man was giving him easy money, he was getting rather impatient with the youth's antics.

"...I don't have all day, you know? How much longer are you planning to warm up?"

Upon hearing that, Johnie's eyes flared up with rage!

With an immense urge to pound Gerald into a pulp, Johnie then roared, "I'm done! With that said, enjoy getting pummelled into fine dust!"

Following that, the youth leaped into the sky... Before rapidly descending down on Gerald, his fist aimed for Gerald's face!

Gerald himself simply stared back at Johnie without even the slightest intention of dodging the hit. After all, from what he could see, Johnie was as slow as a snail.

With that said, before Johnie could even lay a finger on Gerald, Gerald quickly retaliated with a kick, sending the shocked Johnie flying backward!

Upon falling onto the ground, the impact from all that was so great that a circular depression instantly formed around Johnie's now limp body!

Though only thirty percent of Gerald's power had been used in that kick, that was all he needed to completely overpower Johnie. Fights against such people were best ended in a single strike anyway.

Barely even able to stand up again, the horrified Johnie stared wide-eyed at the monstrous youth...

To think that Gerald was able to completely defeat him in just a single strike! The thought of it alone struck a massive fear within his heart...

Chapter 1619

Regardless, the terrified Johnie could only stare as Gerald slowly walked over to him... before squatting right before him and outstretching his right hand.

Looking at Johnie right in the eye, Gerald then said, "Well, as you've promised, a hundred million dollars for losing, please!"

Upon hearing that, Johnie—who had already closed his eyes, expecting the worst to happen—instantly found himself heaving a sigh of relief... As it turned out, Gerald was particularly trying to teach him a lesson...

Either way, Johnie understood that it was his total defeat, so he simply handed the hundred million dollars over to Gerald. Money would always come and go, so that amount was nothing much to Johnie.

However, though he didn't particularly care about losing the money, he did care about losing his pride. His dignity as the young master of the Lager family had been shattered, and Johnie simply couldn't stand that...

Whatever the case was, after taking the money, Gerald then left with Nori, leaving the depressed youth lying on the ground... It truly appeared that Gerald didn't care about Johnie at all...

After quite a while, Johnie finally got to his feet before slowly limping away...

This... This wasn't over yet...!

By that point, Gerald and Nori had just found a suitable café to chat in.

The second she sat down, Nori immediately displayed an enthusiastic expression as she asked, "So, why did you come looking for me, Gerald? Could it be that you missed me?"

Raising a slight brow, Gerald wondered if the girl had fallen for him to even ask such a question...

"...I simply came over to ask you about something!" replied Gerald with a serious face.

"...Oh, come on...! You could've given me a more interesting reply, you know? What a boring man!" pouted Nori rather adorably.

Gerald was a rather eloquent person and he knew it, but he was also well aware that he was already a married man. With that said, he needed to be serious when talking with other women so that they wouldn't get the wrong idea. With that said, the fact that he had pretended to be Nori's boyfriend earlier was already a rather big exception on his part.

Truth be told, if he wasn't already a thing with Mila, who knows, maybe he would've actually had feelings for Nori. Then again, it was pointless to think of such scenarios when he already had such a perfect wife.

Regardless, Gerald ignored Nori's pouting and simply asked, "So... Tell me, do you know anyone by the name of God Lord, Nori?"

"Not at all!" grumbled Nori as she turned to face her side.

Seeing her reaction, Gerald could only sigh in resignation. Girls in this era were simply too difficult to deal with!

No longer a person who entertained the whims of others, Gerald then stood up before saying, "Very well, then. You can just forget about it. I'll be taking my leave now, and sorry to have bothered you!"

Seeing that Gerald really was getting ready to leave, Nori instantly started to panic. If Gerald really left

now, then all her previous actions would've been meaningless!!

Gerald, for one, was well aware that Nori wasn't really angry with him. She was simply pretending to pout so that he would care a bit more about her. Unfortunately for her, Gerald was no bootlicker, so he wasn't about to fall for her bait anytime soon.

"Fine, fine! I won't tease you anymore! You really are an insensitive person, you know?" grumbled Nori as she quickly pulled him back to his seat.

Hearing that, Gerald obliged before turning to look at Nori, keenly awaiting her answer.

Chapter 1620

“You were asking about God Lord, right? His real name is Apollo and he’s the supreme ruler of Jaellatra! He lives in the God Temple!” explained Nori.

Hearing that, Gerald now realized that his actions must’ve already caught the attention of Jaellatra’s supreme ruler...

“Actually, why the sudden interest in him, Gerald? Just so you know, God Lord isn’t as simple as you may think he is. According to rumors, he’s already trained enough to attain the Seventh-soul-rank in the Sage Realm! With that said, he truly is a terrifying individual!” added Nori.

Even though Nori was clueless as to why Gerald was asking about the God Lord, it was clear that she was warning him against trying to mess with Apollo.

After finding out that Apollo had possibly already entered the Seventh-soul-rank in the Sage Realm, Gerald felt a shiver run down his spine... If that was really the case, then Apollo was surely someone with monstrous strength...

Since Gerald was now only nearing the Second-soul-rank within the Sage Realm, the gap between him and Apollo was almost astronomical... If he were to anger Apollo at his current strength, Gerald would no doubt be killed in seconds, completely unable to even defend himself...

“...I see. Then... Do you know of a man donning black robes who acts as a follower of the God Lord?” asked Gerald.

After thinking for a while, Nori then replied, “I... do recall such a man, yes... I think his name was Hisham... Regardless, he’s one of God Lord’s henchmen, and he mostly aids Apollo in managing matters around Jaellatra. Since the God Lord himself hardly ever shows up in public, Hisham is the one who usually does all that needs to be done.”

Hearing that, Gerald found that it all matched up. Based on Nori’s description of him, Gerald was now

pretty sure that Hisham was the person who had tried to test him back then.

Still, Gerald had a hunch that Apollo wasn't particularly going after him yet. After all, Hisham had left almost immediately after testing Gerald's capabilities.

"Don't... tell me that you've already offended the God Lord, Gerald..." mumbled Nori as she looked at Gerald, concern in her eyes.

Shaking his head, Gerald then replied, "Don't worry, I'm not stupid enough to piss off someone who's attained the Seventh-soul-rank in the Sage Realm!"

Relieved to hear that, Nori then said, "I'm glad to hear that... Speaking of which, why did you ask for so much money from Johnie? Are you short of money or something?"

Though a hundred million dollars wasn't that much to Nori either, it was still a sum that would be able to sustain an ordinary person for life.

Chuckling in response, Gerald simply replied, "Putting it bluntly, it's much more fun spending someone else's money when shopping! Speaking of shipping, I've heard that Jaellatra is famous for its secret technique talismans... Could you bring me over to the place that sells them? I've been itching to get my hands on some!"

Upon hearing that, Nori now understood that Gerald had returned to Jaellatra to obtain some secret technique talismans. It also explained why he had asked for so much money from Johnie.

"Of course! Though... Are you sure that a hundred million dollars is enough...?" asked Nori rather doubtfully.

After all, secret technique talismans were rather rare, even in Jaellatra. With that said, they were exceptionally pricey, with even the most common of talismans costing around a few thousand dollars.

With that in mind, the more advanced secret technique talismans were undoubtedly priced much, much higher than that...

"I believe that the earnings I got off Johnie should be sufficient. Even if it isn't, I have my own money as well. Regardless, let's go have a look at the talismans first before anything else!" replied Gerald with a calm smile. After all, money had never really been an issue for him, and he wasn't about to start worrying about not having enough.

Regardless, with all that out of the way, the duo then quickly finished their coffee before heading off to the largest secret technique talisman sales center in Jaellatra, Talisman Hall.

All the secret technique talismans in Jaellatra were made there, and the one responsible for crafting the more advanced ones went by the name of Boshier, the Great Talisman Master. Either way, upon completion, the talismans would then be placed in the Talisman hall where they would then be either auctioned or sold...

Chapter 1621

As they approached the Talisman hall, Gerald saw that the entire building was plated in gold. There also appeared to be a huge stone tablet carved into the shape of a secret technique talisman in front of the building.

Since it was located near the entrance, it was only fair to assume that the tablet was the symbol of the Talisman Hall...

Not many people came to the Talisman Hall in general, and those who did were usually dressed in luxurious clothing. That didn't really come as a surprise, however, since this place was even fancier than even the most expensive of locations within Jaellatra.

Regardless, upon arriving at the main entrance, Gerald and Nori were greeted by the sight of a man donning a robe that looked similar to a court robe.

Naturally, one needed to fulfill certain conditions to even be able to enter the building, and the man

acted as the doorkeeper of the Talisman Hall.

After looking at a charm that Nori fished out from her pocket, the doorkeeper's eyes instantly lit up as he smiled before respectfully saying, "Welcome, Miss Zahn!"

The charm was an identity charm, and such charms were used to symbolize one's status within Jaellatra. Since Nori was the eldest young lady of the Zahn family—a rather prestigious family within Earth Capital—the doorkeeper naturally knew who Nori was.

Either way, after nodding in response at the doorkeeper, Nori then asked, "He's my friend, so he should be allowed to enter a well, correct?"

"Yes, by all means! Please, come in!" replied the doorkeeper respectfully as he opened the door of the Talisman Hall before gesturing for them to enter.

"Thank you!" replied Nori with a polite tone before leading Gerald into the Talisman Hall's main lobby.

Once they were inside, Gerald was immediately flabbergasted by the number of exquisite secret technique talismans displayed within the hall.

"The secret technique talismans within the lobby are the most unique ones in all of Jaellatra. After all, there's only one of each talisman! With that said, they're all extremely rare and precious! Do note, however, that since all these talismans are of perfect quality, they aren't ever going to be sold or auctioned off!" explained Nori as she pointed at the talismans displayed in the lobby.

"Now, you may or may not know this, but secret technique talismans are divided into six main categories, them being basic, common, middle, high, rare, and perfect! As I said earlier, apart from the few talismans within this hall's lobby, no other perfect talismans exist!" added Nori who was starting to sound more and more like a tour guide.

“Aren’t the most skillful advanced secret technique talisman crafters able to produce talismans of perfect quality?” asked Gerald.

Shaking her head with a slightly bitter smile, Nori then replied, “Even though Boshier is already a great master in making secret technique talismans, he’s only capable of producing ones of the rare quality. He hasn’t been able to improve his skills enough to create a talisman of perfect quality!”

“The perfect ones you see in the lobby were created a few decades ago by the first secret technique talisman crafter, Master Kyzer. Throughout history, nobody’s been able to surpass Master Kyzer’s skill, and nobody has any idea how he even managed to make such perfect talismans! It’s been an ongoing mystery, you know?”

After hearing all that, Gerald’s interest in secret technique talismans slowly grew. Eventually, he couldn’t help but ask, “I do wonder if there’s a way for one to learn how to make talismans...”

“Of course, there is! Essentially, one has to first join the Talisman Union, and there also needs to be a special tutor willing to accept that person as their student. Without those two, it’s near impossible to learn anything about talisman making,” replied Nori.

So, he first needed to get himself a tutor before he could even begin learning how to make talismans... This was going to be a challenge for Gerald. After all, the only person he knew in Jaellatra was Nori.

Forget tutors, he didn’t even know a single teacher here! With that in mind, it was certainly going to be difficult for him to learn how to make secret technique talismans...

Chapter 1622

“Still, why are you suddenly asking me about this? Could you be interested in learning how to craft secret technique talismans?” asked Nori as she smiled at him.

Seeing that she seemed to have caught on, Gerald didn’t deny it and simply nodded slowly.

“...Well, if you truly are interested in learning, I could introduce you to someone I know. He’s a Second-rank Talisman Master within the Talisman Union, and his name is Chace Hunt. He’s an old friend of my father!” suggested Nori.

“Is that possible? I mean, I’m not even a local to Jaellatra. Am I qualified to learn how to craft secret technique talismans...?” asked Gerald, knowing full well about the prejudice many people from Jaellatra had against those from earth. There was simply too massive a difference between the people from the two lands.

“Don’t worry, Master Hunt is a nice person, so I’m sure he won’t mind! Besides, my father isn’t one to ostracize those from outside Jaellatra!” replied Nori, convincing him not to worry too much about it.

“...Well, alright then. However, I still have some matters to attend to, so I won’t be able to start learning just yet. I’d appreciate it if I could start learning when I return here again!” said Gerald after thinking about it for a moment.

“No problem!” replied Nori as both of them finally made their way into the hall where the talismans were sold.

Noticing their arrival, a sales staff smiled brightly as she quickly walked over to the duo before respectfully saying, “Welcome! How may I help you?”

People who were able to enter the Talisman Hall weren’t ordinary folk, so the sales staff was well aware that he had to be on his best behavior in front of them.

“My friend’s here to buy some talismans!” replied Nori.

“Ah, I see! Please, come this way, then! I’ll first be showing you the new talismans made by Great Talisman Master Boshier first!” replied the staff as he led them to a display counter decorated with gold. Within it, a row of talismans could be seen...

“These are the latest rare quality talismans that Master Boshier made. There are attack spell talismans, defense spell talismans, stratagem spell talismans, as well as space spell talismans,” explained the staff in great detail.

Upon seeing them, Gerald couldn't help but feel overwhelmed. While the talismans were nothing short of marveling, each of their price labels—which were displayed at the bottom of each talisman—started with units that began in the millions! No wonder Nori had earlier asked him whether he was sure if he had enough with him! As it turned out, the hundred million dollars that he had obtained from Johnie was only sufficient to buy two talismans at most!

Judging from the expression on Gerald's face, Nori was immediately able to tell that he didn't have enough on him. With that in mind, she then leaned a bit closer to Gerald before whispering, “Is there anything you fancy, Gerald...?”

Upon hearing that, Gerald simply shook his head before turning to look at the staff again and asking, “Are there any other talismans here apart from these?”

Since this place was so huge, it was only fair to assume that much cheaper talismans were also sold here.

1623

“But of course! Please, follow me!” replied the staff as he led Gerald and Nori into another hall.

Upon entering, a multitude of talismans could be seen hung dazzlingly on the walls. With all of them seeming to have varying levels of quality, Gerald quickly began browsing to see which ones he needed.

Thankfully, the ones inside this hall were much affordable, ranging only from prices between a few thousand to several million dollars.

It took him about an hour, but by the time Gerald was finally done, he had bought a few hundred middle and high-quality talismans. He got himself a few dozen rare quality ones as well.

In total, the final sum amounted to a whopping hundred and thirty million dollars! Naturally, Gerald had used his own money to cover the extra costs. Still, Gerald now knew how pricey these talismans could get!

Even so, they were a necessary purchase. After all, he wanted to have them ready for self-defense and also in case of emergencies. The best thing about talismans was that not only did they have varying functionalities and powers, but they were also easily carried around and used.

Regardless, now that he was done shopping for talismans, both Nori and Gerald left the Talisman Hall.

Now that they were out, Nori turned to look at Gerald before asking, "So... What do you intend to do next?"

Not seeing the need to hide anything, Gerald then replied, "I'm heading to Sunniva City on earth!"

"Oh? Why?" asked Nori in a curious tone.

"Well, there are still a few Quartermains I haven't taken out yet... More specifically, I haven't exterminated those from the second clan of the Quartermains, the Quantocks of Sunniva City!" explained Gerald.

Upon hearing that, Nori understood what Gerald had earlier meant when he said he still had business to attend to. Sure enough, if he didn't take care of the Quantocks as soon as possible, they would surely cause him future troubles.

"...I see! Well, please be careful, alright? And if you need any help, you can just contact me and I'll try my best to lend you my aid!" replied Nori.

"I'll keep that in mind!" said Gerald with a smile before rapidly leaping away...

Staring at his quickly disappearing back, Nori wondered whether he would one day accept her...

Meanwhile, Johnie had finally managed to limp all the way home in his wretched state. With his hair messy and his usual temperament—as the young master of the Lager family—completely gone, Johnie now looked more like a beggar than anything...

Upon noticing Johnie's return, a man—who honestly looked quite similar to Johnie—found himself surprised as he asked, "Johnie? What happened to you? How did you end up like this?"

"I... I was beaten up by someone, brother...!" replied Johnie as he looked at Jonas Lager with a defeated expression.

Jonas was Johnie's eldest brother, and he had entered the First-soul-rank of the Sage Realm.

With such great strength, Jonas was also a member of the Fury Squad, one of the more well-hidden underground forces in Jaellatra. The Fury Squad's members consisted of a group of assassins as well as strong cultivators. Together, their job was to accomplish missions given to them.

"What? To think that someone would actually dare to beat you up! Tell me who that man is so that I can avenge you!" roared Jonas.

"I... I don't know him very well... I only know that he seems to be Nori's boyfriend!" replied Johnie in a bitter tone, feeling both angered and pained every time he thought about Gerald.

After all, for the young master of the Lager family to be beaten up by some brat... It truly was a disgrace to the Lagers!

"So, the Zahns are involved! It appears that they're getting more and more arrogant as time goes on...!"

How dare they go against our family...!"

Chapter 1624

Jonas's expression seemed to darken exponentially as he howled in rage.

Truth be told, both the Zahns and the Lagers were equally powerful in Jaellatra. Since neither family was weaker than the other, both families made sure never to offend each other.

Due to Gerald's involvement in Nori's matters this time, however, it appeared that the two families were finally going to have a dispute...

"Don't worry, Johnie, I'll definitely help you out with this matter. In fact, I'm telling father about this! Let's see what the Zahns are truly capable of!" growled Jonas as he narrowed his eyes before supporting his brother back to his room to get some rest...

Fast forward to that night, the Quantock family manor could be seen brightly lit and servants of that family seemed to be standing guard all over the place.

Zaki himself was standing in the lobby, looking at everyone before him rather anxiously. After all, the three elders had been gone for almost an entire day now! Despite that, they hadn't reported back at all...

Seeing how worried his father was, Shawn then said, "Don't worry, father! The three elders are exceedingly strong, remember? They'll surely be able to get rid of Gerald!"

"I can only hope so!" replied Zaki, his brows tightly furrowed.

Just as Zaki's sentence ended, however, Gerald's voice could suddenly be heard shouting, "Tough luck! Instead of hoping for the impossible, why don't you start thinking how you're going to explain your deaths to the rest of the Quartermains?"

Hearing Gerald's voice echo throughout the manor, Zaki and the rest of his family instantly fell into panic, desperately trying to see where Gerald was hiding.

However, the very next second, Gerald appeared right behind Zaki and lifted the man with a single hand!

Squeezing onto Zaki's neck, Gerald then added in a frigid tone, "You're a stubborn old thing, Zaki! Did you really have to force me to come to Sunniva City so soon?"

His face now reddened, Zaki could only flail feebly as he tried to break free from Gerald's grasps. Naturally, there was no way that was happening, and Zaki was now finding it exceedingly difficult to even breathe.

"Release my father, Gerald!" roared Shawn as he glared at Gerald.

Ignoring Shawn's words, Gerald simply ordered, "Kneel! All of you!"

Upon hearing that, all the Quantocks simply exchanged glances with each other. In the end, not one of them was willing to obey Gerald's orders.

"I see how it is! Well, since nobody took my advice, enjoy your trip to hell!" scoffed Gerald as he tightened his grasp around Zaki's neck...

With a sickening 'snap' Zaki was no longer among the living.

"F-father...!"

"Master...!"

Upon realizing that Gerald had really done the deed, Shawn and the other Quantocks could only shriek in terror!

Unable to hold back his rage, Shawn then charged toward Gerald while roaring, “You b*stard...! I’ll kill you...!”

Sadly, his efforts were completely useless. Gerald had come to Sunniva City specifically to eliminate the Quantocks. Just like how he had exterminated the Quartermains, he wasn’t about to spare anyone in this family.

‘To be soft to the enemy is to be cruel to oneself,’ was a saying that Gerald came to learn as he matured...

And just like that, both the Quartermains and the Quantocks ceased to exist.

With his job now done, Gerald then quickly left Sunniva City to return to Jaellatra.

1625

It was the next morning when a few luxurious cars could be seen parked before the Zahn family’s manor. Notably, each of the cars’ license plates began with the word ‘Lager’, making it clear who was paying the Zahns a visit.

After the beat-up Johnie returned home yesterday, Jonas had reported the incident to his father—who was also the head of the Lager family—, Augustus Lager.

Upon hearing that someone had hurt his second son, Augustus was rightfully enraged. It certainly didn’t help that he was a man who was very protective of his children.

Unable to stand the fact that his beloved son was injured, he was here today to argue about this with

the Zahns.

“Master Zahn, if you weren’t aware, your daughter’s boyfriend beat up my son! How do you plan to settle this? I won’t leave till you give me an acceptable answer!” shouted Augustus who was currently sitting cross-legged in front of the leader of the Zahn family, Yoshua Zahn.

Before Yoshua could even reply, Nori—who had been standing by his side—retorted, “The answer is simple! Your son’s been endlessly pestering me so he got what he deserved!”

“Quiet, Nori!” shouted her father.

Upon hearing that, Nori didn’t dare utter another word and simply stood meekly by his side.

Following that, Yoshua turned to look at the Lagers. While Augustus appeared to be rather gloomy, Jonas—who was standing beside his father—had a frigid expression on his face.

Sensing how powerful Jonas’s aura was, Yoshua could instantly tell how strong the boy was. With that in mind, Jonas was definitely not someone to mess with.

Regardless, after a slight pause, Yoshua said in a monotonous tone, “The way I see it, both of us are responsible for this matter, Master Lager. While I’ll certainly apologize to your son on behalf of my daughter, as Nori said, it was your son who started all this. With that said, once my apology is made, I hope your son doesn’t pester my daughter any further!”

As the leader of the Zahns, Yoshua was well aware that he couldn’t compromise too much with the Lagers.

“Cut the crap, Yoshua. Look, your daughter had better apologize to my son in person today! Fail to do that and I’ll destroy your family!” threatened Augustus as he slammed his hands against the table.

Hearing that, Yoshua instantly frowned. To think that Augustus would be arrogant enough to claim to want to destroy his family! He truly didn't appear to respect the Zahns at all!

"Getting a bit too arrogant, aren't we, Master Lager? I hope you remember that my family's already managed to gain a foothold in Jaellatra! With that said, we won't be an easy target!" retorted Yoshua icily.

"Oh really? I'd like to see you try defending yourselves against us!" scoffed Augustus with a disdainful snort before waving a hand.

A split second later, over ten strong-looking men in black rushed in, instantly alarming the Zahns!

"How imprudent! This is the Zahn family manor! Do you really think that this is a place for you to do as you please?!" yelled Nori as she glared at Augustus and his men before moving for the door, unable to stand being in the presence of the Lagers anymore.

However, her path was easily blocked by Jonus who—while glaring daggers at her—then threatened, "I'm sure you're well aware that my brother likes you, Nori. Look, if you accompany my brother for an entire day, I'll consider sparing the Zahns. Fail to comply, however, and I'll make sure you pay dearly! What do you say?"

"What exactly do you have in mind when you say, 'pay dearly?'" scoffed Nori, barely intimidated by Jonas's threats.

"It's simple really... It simply means that I won't show you any more mercy!" roared Jonas as his pressuring aura immediately intensified!

"Lay a finger on her and I guarantee that you won't be leaving this place alive!"

The second Jonas's sentence ended, Gerald's voice could suddenly be heard!

Recognizing that voice anywhere, Nori then exclaimed, "Gerald!"

Following that, Gerald walked in rather casually with his hands in his pockets.

While Gerald's surprising arrival made Nori's heart race, Jonas and Augustus's faces instantly turned red in rage!

"So, are you the one who hurt my son?" growled Augustus as he glared at Gerald.

Turning to look at him, Gerald then snorted before scoffing, "That's right! After all, your arrogant son was the one who challenged me to a duel! What? Is he now trying to get others to take revenge for his sake after he lost? How pathetic can he be?"

Hearing that instantly sent Augustus's blood boiling! For a brat, Gerald really knew how to pinpoint his weakness!

As Gerald had said, Johnie would surely be a laughing stock should people come to realize that he got his family to take revenge for him after losing to a duel that he started!

"Whatever the case is, you still beat up my brother! I can't just let this pass! With that said, I'm challenging you to a duel now!" growled Jonas as he walked toward Gerald.

"What makes you think you'll be my match when your brother couldn't even lay a finger on me?" retorted Gerald as he looked at Jonas with disdainful eyes.

Upon hearing that, Jonas was so enraged that he ended up clenching his fists so tightly that his veins bulged hideously on his arms!

“That doesn’t answer my question. Or are you chickening out now?” provoked Jonas who couldn’t wait to tear Gerald into pieces!

Gerald, for one, could instantly tell what was on Jonas’s mind. Gerald hadn’t been afraid of the man in the first place, and since Jonas was asking for his doom, Gerald had no problem with granting his wish.

“Oh, I accept the challenge alright, on one condition. If you lose, you and the rest of the Lagers must stop pestering Nori. Sound good?” replied Gerald.

“Deal! However, what if you lose?”

“You can do whatever you want with me if that comes to be!” said Gerald rather nonchalantly. After all, from what Gerald could tell, Jonas wasn’t anywhere near his match.

With the conditions agreed upon, both men then began walking out to begin their duel.

As the others quickly followed along, Nori ran over to Gerald’s side before whispering, “Gerald, his brother isn’t as weak as Johnie is... Are you sure about this...?”

Smiling in return, Gerald simply replied, “Don’t worry, he’s barely even a match for me!”

Seeing how confident Gerald’s smile was, Nori could instantly rest assured. After all, she knew that Gerald was the kind of person who would only say such a thing if he was absolutely sure of his victory.

Now outside, Jonas then glared at Gerald before yelling, “I hope you enjoy watching me crush your bones!”

“Talk is cheap!” sneered Gerald.

Jonas was honestly severely underestimating Gerald’s capabilities. After all, though his brother had failed to take Gerald out, Jonas knew for a fact that the gap between Johnie’s and his strength was extremely vast. With that in mind, Jonas was confident that he could defeat Gerald easily.

“Bring it on!” roared the infuriated Jonas as his aura flared up! Following that, the man began charging at Gerald with immense speed!

Chapter 1627

His fist aimed at Gerald’s head, Jonas was sure that upon collision, Gerald’s skull would instantly split open!

However, he was a fool if he thought that Gerald was going to grant that chance to him. With great ease, Gerald simply stepped to the side to dodge the attack!

Even so, as Jonas’s fist flew right past Gerald’s face, Gerald could feel the immense power in the punch... As someone who had entered the First-soul-rank of the Sage Realm, Jonas was undoubtedly a strong one...

Unfortunately for him, his opponent was Gerald.

Realizing that his attack had actually missed, Jonas was left slightly shocked. To think that Gerald was actually this fast!

Quickly recovering his wits, Jonas then swiftly turned around to launch a lethal kick at Gerald!

However, once again, Gerald dodged the attack without any trouble.

From that alone, the difference in the duo’s capabilities was made clear as day. In the world of martial

arts, the speedier one always had the advantage, and this was clearly illustrated by the fact that Jonas hadn't been able to land a single hit on Gerald. Gerald was just so much faster than him!

With that in mind, the winner of this battle had already been decided...

Though he knew that, Jonas refused to admit defeat! After all, he had sworn to himself that he would avenge his brother by defeating Gerald!

"Humph! Are you only capable of dodging?" taunted Jonas with a snort.

Though he said that, Jonas was honestly feeling greatly humiliated. After all, it seemed like Gerald wasn't taking him seriously at all! Even so, he now accepted that Gerald wasn't any weaker than he was. After all, none of his attacks had landed!

"I'm just worried that you'll get knocked out from a single attack!" retorted Gerald with a contemptuous smile on his face.

Upon hearing that, Jonas's fury spiked as he clenched his teeth. How prideful!

"You arrogant brat...!" roared Jonas as he charged up all his power before attacking Gerald with all his might!

Of course, Gerald easily avoided it, though the second Jonas's attack missed, Gerald calmly stood in place. Since Jonas wanted him to attack so much, Gerald would gladly oblige!

It only took a split second for Gerald to kick Jonas right in the stomach. Gerald's movements were so rapid that Jonas couldn't even react in time!

Momentarily finding himself soaring, it was a second later when his entire body crashed to the ground!

Seeing that his son—who was now coughing out blood—was barely even able to take a single kick from Gerald, August's face instantly paled. He hadn't thought that his son would actually lose to Gerald!

Staring at the injured man, Gerald then called out in a monotonous tone, "You've lost!"

Though Jonas clearly appeared unwilling to admit to that, Gerald was right. Understanding that, Jonas could only choose to accept his defeat. After all, choosing otherwise would surely make him a laughing stock to the public...

Chapter 1628

Following that, Augustus quickly led Jonas into one of their cars before leaving immediately.

Seeing that the Lagers had left, Nori joyously cheered, "You did it, Gerald! You're so strong that even Jonas wasn't your opponent!"

As Nori continued praising Gerald, Yoshua the other Zahns could only continue staring at the youth, still surprised by the outcome of that battle.

Noticing that her family was speechless, Nori then took the chance to introduce Gerald to her father.

"Father, this is the person I was talking about earlier! His name is Gerald Crawford!"

Hearing that, Yoshua simply nodded before signaling them to return to the hall for now...

Once seated, Gerald took the initiative to greet, "It's a pleasure to meet you, Master Zahn!"

"The pleasure is mine. You know, Nori's been telling me how powerful you were for a while now... After witnessing the events of today, I can safely say that I agree with her!" replied Yoshua, looking at Gerald

with a satisfied expression.

“You flatter me, Master Zahn. Since I’m good friends with Nori, her troubles are mine as well. Regardless, it was my impulsiveness that started all this trouble in the first place. With that said, I hope you accept my apology!” declared Gerald in an apologetic tone.

After all, had he not beaten Johnie up, the Lagers wouldn’t have come over to confront them in the first place.

“There’s no way this is your fault, Gerald! I’m clearly the one wrong here for using you as my shield!” said Nori as she took a step forward to defend him.

“Alright, that’s enough blaming yourselves. I never liked that Lager kid in the first place. It’s honestly not the first time I’ve heard of him pestering Nori either. With that said, you did a good job, Gerald! With your help, Johnie will hopefully come to realize that not everyone in the world is afraid of him! Hell, who even are the Lagers? They’re still lightyears away from being capable enough to harm our family!” declared Yoshua.

Truth be told Yoshua wasn’t afraid of the Lagers at all. However, if they really ended up becoming enemies, Yoshua knew that both families would suffer great losses. Even so, Yoshua would’ve been willing to battle it out for the sake of his daughter...

At that moment, Nori appeared to suddenly remember something. With that, she quickly turned to face her father before asking, “Father, you’re an old friend of Master Hunt, right? From the Talisman Union? I need your help with something!”

“...Hmm? Are you thinking of joining the union?” asked Yoshua rather curiously.

“Not at all! I’m just asking on Gerald’s behalf! He’s interested in learning how to make secret technique talismans!” replied Nori as she shook her head before turning to look at Gerald.

From that, Yoshua easily caught on that his daughter must have fallen for Gerald. Though she had earlier said that she had only used Gerald as a shield, Yoshua was well aware that his daughter liked Gerald.

Regardless, Gerald then smiled at Yoshua before respectfully saying, “She’s right, Master Zahn. If it isn’t too much trouble, I’d like to ask for your aid in this!”

Yoshua, for one, already had a rather good impression of Gerald. After all, not only was he already this powerful at his age, but the youth was also close friends with his daughter! With that in mind, there was no way Yoshua would refuse to help.

“Don’t worry, the most it’ll cost me is a few words. How about this? I’ll contact Master Hunt and invite him over so that both of you can meet first. If he’s willing to accept you as his disciple, I congratulate you. However, if he declines, I won’t attempt to force him either. How’s that?” asked Yoshua as he proposed the best arrangement he could think of.

“I’ll gladly accept your arrangements! Thank you for your efforts, Master Zahn!” replied Gerald without even thinking twice about it.

After all, the fact that Yoshua—whom Gerald wasn’t even well acquainted with yet—was willing to help was already a pleasant surprise to him. In the end, all this was thanks to Nori...

Chapter 1629

It wasn’t long after before an old man donning long robes entered the Zahn family manor.

With a gold badge pinned near his chest, the individual was none other than Master Chace Hunt himself, a Second-rank Talisman Master in the Talisman Union...

“Ah, you’re here, Chace!” said Yoshua as he quickly walked over to greet the old man when he saw him.

“So, what exactly did you want to meet me for, Yoshua?” asked Chace without beating around the bush.

With how casually they were talking to each other, it appeared that both of them were old friends.

“Well, I’d like to introduce you to someone who has interest in learning how to craft secret technique talismans. I figured the details could be sorted out better face to face, which is why I invited you over!” replied Yoshua with a smile.

Slightly startled when he heard that, Chace then joked, “Don’t tell me you’re trying to make your precious daughter my disciple!”

Instantly laughing in response, Yoshua then replied, “I’d be overjoyed if she actually had interest in talisman making at all! However, she has her own plans. Regardless, he’s the person I’d like to introduce you to!”

Following that, Yoshua then positioned a hand toward Gerald’s direction.

As Chace stared at Gerald, Yoshua then added, “Gerald, this is Master Chace Hunt, a Second-rank Talisman Master in the Talisman Union!”

Upon hearing that, Gerald instantly greeted Chace in a polite tone, “It’s a pleasure to meet you, Master Hunt! I go by Gerald Crawford, and I’ve heard many tales of your great achievements in the craftsmanship of secret technique talismans! With that said, I hope you’ll accept me as your disciple and teach me the ways of making secret technique talismans!”

Raising a slight eyebrow after hearing that, Chace then turned to look at Yoshua before saying, “I’m sure you recall that I don’t just take anyone as my disciple, Yoshua...”

To be completely honest, Chace wasn’t too interested in taking Gerald under his wing. Now, if it was Nori who wanted to learn from him, Chace would have agreed to do so without a second thought. After all, she was Yoshua’s daughter, and he, for one, would certainly give face to Yoshua.

Gerald, however, was a complete stranger to him, which was why Chace was already slightly reluctant to accept him.

“I remember, however, do know that he isn’t an ordinary person... He’s quite talented and extremely strong! He’s also Nori’s best friend, so...” muttered Yoshua as he nodded at the old man.

“So, you’re telling me to make an exception and take him as my disciple, right? Hmm... How about this, I’ll give him a test, and if he passes it, I’ll accept him. How does that sound?” suggested Chace.

Being an old friend of Yoshua’s, Chace knew he still had to give him some face. With that in mind, he figured that testing Gerald would be the fairest way to decide things.

Upon hearing that, Yoshua then turned to look at Gerald to see his response.

Naturally, Gerald barely hesitated as he said, “I agree! And if I don’t pass the test, I, Gerald Crawford, swear not to bother Master Hunt anymore!”

Hearing that, Chace then waved his hand, prompting a brush and blank talisman to manifest before both him and Gerald.

“Very well, then! My test is simple. If you truly are as talented as Yoshua says, then you’ll be able to copy my talisman. If you pass, I’ll take you as my disciple!” explained Chace.

Following that, Chace held onto his brush before quickly drawing on his talisman...

Chapter 1630

A few seconds later, Chace lowered his brush before tossing the talisman into the sky... And just like that, the talisman transformed into a golden phoenix that then soared away!

“This talisman is called the Soaring Golden Phoenix!” explained Chace as he signaled for Gerald to begin.

Getting the hint, Gerald then closed his eyes before carefully recalling each of Chace’s previous brush strokes.

Seeing that Gerald wasn’t writing anything after a while, Chace then said, “You know, you can just give up if you can’t do it!”

‘Give up...?’ Gerald thought to himself, feeling slightly upset. When did he ever admit defeat? Giving up just wasn’t in his dictionary!

After a few more seconds, Gerald suddenly opened his eyes wide before reaching out for the brush and beginning to draw a talisman similar to Chace’s. With how fluid his movements were, it almost felt like Gerald was guiding water down a river as he drew.

It was so fluid, in fact, that Chace found his initial disdain quickly changing into surprise. He couldn’t help but admit that Gerald was actually quite talented in the crafting of secret technique talismans...

What more, Gerald had managed to memorize the strokes and patterns of the talisman in such a short amount of time! Naturally, Gerald wasn’t able to draw the talisman as fast as Chace could since this was his first time doing this. Even so, his performance was still beyond satisfactory for Chace.

After around ten seconds, Chace saw that Gerald had managed to make an exact copy of his talisman!

Following that, everyone watched as Gerald tossed the talisman into the air... and a crisp shriek of a phoenix followed!

A split second later, a golden phoenix materialized and began encircling everyone in the air... With such majestic wings, the soaring phoenix looked truly marvelous...

Regardless, Gerald had succeeded!

Clapping his hands, Chace had a bright and satisfied smile on his face as he said, “Not bad! Yoshua really wasn’t kidding when he said you were talented! Fine, then! I’ll be taking you as my disciple as we agreed!”

Hearing that, Gerald instantly thanked Chace in a respectful tone, “I appreciate the compliments, Master!”

Even Nori and Yoshua were pleased to see this. Nori in particular was especially happy for Gerald. She truly hadn’t expected Gerald to be able to replicate Master Hunt’s talisman so perfectly!

“Since I’ve now taken you under my wing, there are two strict rules you need to abide by!” said Chace with a sudden stern expression on his face.

“Do state them, Master! I’ll obey anything you say!”

“Nicely said! First of all, you must use any of the secret technique talismans within Jaellatra. Secondly, you must never teach others how to make the talismans!” said Chace.

Both rules were the commandments of the Talisman Union, and nobody was allowed to break them. Once broken, the rule breaker would instantly be expelled from the union and lose their status as a member!

Though Gerald easily memorized the rules, he found the first rule to be slightly confusing.

He mustn’t use any of the secret technique talismans within Jaellatra? Did that mean he could still use them back on earth...?

Regardless, after telling him the rules, Chace then said, "Right, then. I'll now bring you to the Talisman Union for registration. After that's done, you'll be an official member of the union and my chief disciple!"

As Gerald and Chace left the Zahn family manor to head to the Talisman Union, Chace made sure to tell Gerald that the process of making talismans wasn't easy. He also took the time to tell Gerald that the Talisman Union was extremely prestigious within Jaellatra. With that in mind, those who were part of the union had statuses comparable to those of nobility within Jaellatra.

Chapter 1631

Once they arrived at the Talisman Union, Chace brought Gerald into the main hall.

A man wearing the same outfit as Chace came to greet them, and a young man was accompanying him.

"Master Hunt, it looks like you have finally gotten yourself a disciple!"

The man greeted Chace with a bright smile.

"Master Griffin, where are you going?"

His name was Llyod Griffin. Like Chace, he was also a Two-rank Talisman Master in the Talisman Union. So, it could be said that they were fellow brothers.

However, Lloyd started taking disciples much earlier than Chace.

"Haha, Master Griffin, where are you going?"

Chace smiled subtly and replied to Llyod.

“Master Griffin, my disciple has produced a middle-quality talisman. I’m bringing him to meet the Great Master to ask him to grant him the title of a One-rank Talisman Scribe!”

Lloyd told Chace rather proudly.

The hierarchical structure of the Talisman Union was divided into four levels, which were, from the bottom to the top, Talisman Scribe, Talisman Scholar, Talisman Master, and Talisman Great Master.

Only when the disciple was acknowledged by his tutor would he be able to receive the title of a Talisman Scribe. After getting the title, it would mean that he had garnered himself a place in the Talisman Union. It was a symbol of his identity.

This was why Lloyd Griffin was so excited.

For so long, Lloyd had already started taking disciples, but Chace hadn’t been able to find a candidate he liked. So naturally, he had been lagging behind a little.

Now, Lloyd’s disciple was getting the title of a One-rank Talisman Scribe, but Chace was just getting himself a disciple. This somehow made Lloyd look down on Chace, thinking that Chace was very far behind him already.

“Then, I shall congratulate you, Master Griffin. However, my disciple is also getting the title of One-rank Talisman Scribe soon!”

Chace, not wanting to lose, replied to Griffin confidently as he was very confident in Gerald.

In Chace’s opinion, Gerald was far more talented than Lloyd’s disciple, and he was definitely going to surpass him.

“Great! I shall wait for that. When the time comes, we can have a match to see whose disciple is more powerful!”

Llyod challenged Chace in advance.

“Why not?”

Chace accepted the challenge immediately without fear.

After that, Llyod left with his disciple.

After Llyod had left, Gerald looked at Chace with a curious face. He asked, “Master, why are you so confident in me?”

Chace laughed heartily and explained, “Because I know you can do it. You are very talented. You will definitely become a very powerful Talisman Master!”

Hearing his praise, Gerald felt a little embarrassed.

He hadn’t even started learning, but Chace was already having so much expectation and confidence in him. Therefore, he had to work very hard and not let Chace down. Otherwise, he would make Chace lose face in the Talisman Union. He had to surpass Llyod’s disciple!

Later, Chace helped Gerald with the registration to join the Talisman Union and got his membership badge. Then, Chace pinned it on Gerald’s chest himself.

Chapter 1632

Looking at the shiny badge, Gerald was overwhelmed.

He had finally become a member of the Talisman Union as well as a disciple of Master Chace Hunt. Now, he could learn how to make secret technique talismans.

“Gerald, you will be staying with me for these few days. I’ll teach you some basic knowledge about secret technique talismans and the ways of drawing the strokes. Although you are very talented, there are things that you still need to learn to master the skills. Talent is an inborn advantage, but you still need to learn a lot of things. Don’t be too proud, understand?”

Master Hunt looked at Gerald and advised him sincerely.

“Yes, Master Hunt. I understand. I will do as you say and work hard in learning how to make the secret technique talismans. I will not embarrass you!”

Gerald looked at Chace with great determination and nodded.

Master Hunt had such high expectations for him, of course he would not let him down.

Having said that, Chace brought Gerald to his residence, and they started the journey of teaching and learning right away.

Time passed quickly. A few days had already passed.

During Gerald’s stay in Chace’s house, Nori came to visit a few times, but she merely came to see how Gerald was coping.

Today, Gerald was practicing alone in the garden.

After learning for a few days, Gerald had fully grasped the basics of the making of the secret technique talismans as well as the stroke patterns.

Chace was very satisfied with Gerald's performance. He was sure that he had not chosen the wrong person. Gerald's talent was extremely high. In just a few days, he was already able to produce a middle-quality talisman easily. Moreover, those talismans were of high grade in that category, and Chace found it rather surprising.

Thinking about his days back then, he did not have Gerald's talent when he was learning how to make talismans. So, he was only able to make middle-grade middle-quality talismans.

As the saying went, talent works, genius creates.

Gerald was the genius. With just a little guidance, he was able to grasp it immediately and then create surprisingly amazing things.

At the moment, Gerald was drawing on the talisman in front of him swiftly. It was a golden dragon. Gerald had seen this golden dragon pattern in an old book. He reckoned it was mysterious and challenging, so he decided to give it a try.

That old book had been given to him by Chace for his learning. Apart from those patterns that were used to make perfect quality talismans, Gerald had basically learnt all the other patterns. This golden dragon was one of the patterns used in perfect quality talismans.

Gerald had long heard that the perfect quality talismans were very difficult to be produced as they required skills and the strokes were extremely detailed and unusual. Hence, nobody was able to produce a perfect quality talisman until now.

However, Gerald did not want to buy it. He thought that there was nothing insurmountable in this world. The only problem was that the way to do so had not been discovered yet.

Ding!

At the end of his first experiment, Gerald threw the talisman in his hand into the sky.

The talisman immediately turned into a golden ray and disappeared.

The first trial was a failure!

“No. It must be the wrong strokes. I want to keep trying!”

Gerald did not give up and started his analysis. Then, he started drawing again.

A few minutes later, after he had finished his drawing, he threw the talisman into the sky for the second time.

Again, the talisman turned into a golden ray and disappeared. But this time, the ray was brighter with a hint of silver. It seemed he had improved a bit.

Seeing this, Gerald's confidence heightened. He felt that he was improving. So if he kept on working he would eventually succeed. Thinking of this, Gerald started his third trial.

Chapter 1632

On his third attempt, Gerald changed the way he did the strokes.

Honestly speaking, this golden dragon pattern was unusual. Starting the strokes at different spots would bring about different outcomes. Only when he found the right spot to start the strokes would he be able to produce the perfect quality talisman.

A few minutes later, Gerald had finished the drawing for the third time.

This time, he had improved a lot.

Although he wasn't able to produce a perfect quality talisman, he had successfully produced a rare quality talisman.

A shiny silver dragon surrounded by golden light gushed out from the talisman and circled Gerald.

"Gerald, how's your practice?"

Just then, Chace came back from work., and he walked into the garden as he asked Gerald.

The next second, Chace opened his eyes wide, and his face changed drastically. He put on a surprised look on his face.

"A rare quality talisman!"

Chace strode forward and shouted as he looked at the silver dragon.

Just as he said that, the silver dragon disappeared before Gerald. The talisman had expired.

Every talisman could only last for a few tens of seconds, one or two minutes at most. Once the time was up, the effect of the talisman would be gone.

"This... Gerald, did you make this?!"

After quite a while, when Chace was finally able to react, he asked Gerald.

Gerald nodded gently and said, "Yes, Master. I made this!"

"How did you manage to produce a rare quality talisman?! Do you already know the strokes used for making rare quality talismans?"

Chace asked Gerald in confusion.

It was impossible for a novice to learn the strokes for making rare quality talismans in such a short time, let alone produce one. He had to learn it step by step in order to reach this stage.

Yet now, Gerald had already produced a rare quality talisman successfully. It was simply mind-blowing.

"Master, I was just practicing here by myself. I kept changing the way I did the strokes, and then I succeeded!"

Gerald explained to Chace calmly.

Chace looked at the wasted talisman papers on the floor. He knew Gerald was not talking big. This was the result of his hard work and practice.

"Come with me to the Great Master Hall. I will take you to meet the Talisman Great Master!"

Chace could no longer bear it and grabbed Gerald's arm as he spoke. The tutor and disciple left the house quickly and headed toward the Great Master Hall.

The Great Master Hall was the residence of the chairman of the Talisman Union, the Talisman Great Master of the Talisman Hall, Chadrick Gibson.

Chace had to report such shocking news to the Talisman Great Master, Chadrick Gibson, and let him grant Gerald the title of One-rank Talisman Scribe.

Soon after, Chace had already arrived at the Great Master Hall with Gerald.

Coincidentally, they met Llyod and his disciple, Nolan Jacobs, at the door.

“Yo, Master Hunt. Are you looking for Talisman Great Master, too?”

Seeing Chace’s arrival, Llyod sneered.

“Master Griffin, why are you here as well? Didn’t your disciple already get the title of a One-rank Talisman Scribe?”

Chace asked calmly. He wondered why he kept bumping into this man wherever he went.

Chapter 1633

Chace would have a headache every time he met with Llyod because this fellow always liked to annoy him, and he would occasionally mock him. Conversely, he would brag about himself. That was just so annoying.

“The Talisman Great Master has gone into seclusion since a few days ago. That’s why my disciple hasn’t gotten his title yet. I heard he was coming out today, so I quickly came to see him. Master Hunt, are you bringing your disciple to get a title as well?”

Lloyd explained to Chace before he asked suspiciously.

“That’s right! My disciple is very talented. He improves very quickly, so I brought him here to get his title!”

Chase replied with high confidence.

Lloyd was a little taken aback when he heard him. He knew that Chace had just accepted a disciple a few days ago, but now, the disciple was already going to get a title. This was a little too fast in his opinion as his disciple had spent almost two months learning before he was qualified to get a title.

“Master Hunt, getting a title is not a trivial matter. You cannot joke around with it. Are you sure your disciple is qualified for that already?”

Lloyd reminded him, looking at Chace in disbelief.

Of course, Chace knew what Lloyd meant. Lloyd clearly did not believe what he had said.

‘Are you kidding me? Gerald has successfully produced a rare quality talisman, and it is worth mentioning that he did it without any guidance. He learned it all by himself! With such talent and ability, how could he not be qualified?’

But of course, Chace would not tell him the truth about Gerald.

“Haha! Of course I know that. Still, I believe that my disciple will not disappoint me!”

Chace chuckled and replied to Lloyd.

After listening to his reply, Lloyd sneered silently in his mind. He wanted to see how Chace embarrassed himself later. He wouldn't believe that Chace's disciple could have succeeded in making a talisman in such a short time.

After a while, the door of the Great Master Hall opened. Chace and Lloyd quickly brought their respective disciples into the hall.

An old man wearing a golden silk dragon robe was seated in the hall. He was the Talisman Great Master of the Talisman Hall, Chadrick Gibson.

"Chace, Lloyd, why are you here?"

Seeing them, Chadrick asked slowly.

"Great Master, I brought my disciple to report to you about his success and to get the title of One-rank Talisman Scribe for him!"

Without waiting for Chace to open his mouth, Lloyd grabbed the chance to speak to Chadrick first.

"Oh? What kind of talisman has your disciple managed to produce?" Chadrick asked again.

To get the rank of a Talisman Scribe, one must get recognition from the Talisman Great Master first.

"Great Master, my disciple, Nolan Jacobs, is able to produce high-grade middle-quality secret technique talisman!" Lloyd replied immediately, his face full of unconcealable pride.

"Hmm. High-grade middle-quality talisman. Not bad. He is indeed talented. Alright, I agree to grant your disciple the title of a One-rank Talisman Scribe. You can go to the hall now and proceed with the registration."

Upon hearing that, Chadrick nodded in satisfaction and said.

Frankly speaking, a One-rank Talisman Scribe was only able to produce a high-grade middle-quality talisman at most.

“Thank you, Great Master!”

Lloyd and his disciple, Nolan, immediately thanked the Talisman Great Master.

“Chace, what about you? Are you here to get a title for your disciple as well?”

Chadrick then looked at Chace and asked.

“Yes, Great Master. My disciple is called Gerald Crawford. He is already able to produce a high-quality secret technique talisman!”

Chace told Chadrick right away.

Chapter 1634

Hearing this, Lloyd and his disciple, who was leaving, stopped in their tracks.

Lloyd turned around quickly and stared at Chace in great disbelief.

“What are you saying? Your disciple can produce a high quality talisman?!” Lloyd asked suspiciously. He did not believe in Chace’s words.

From what he knew, Chace’s disciple had only studied for a few days. How could it be possible that he

was able to produce a high quality secret technique talisman? In fact, his disciple was only able to produce a middle-quality talisman after studying for almost two months.

Nevertheless, just because his disciple couldn't do it, it didn't mean that Gerald couldn't do it either.

"Chace, how long has your disciple been following you?" Chadrick asked.

"Five days, Great Master."

Chace answered honestly.

"Impossible!"

"Great Master, this is absolutely impossible. Chace must be lying to you. How is it possible that his disciple can produce a high quality talisman after learning for just five days?!"

Before Chadrick could say anything, Lloyd was already shouting angrily at Chadrick. He did not believe it at all.

Chace couldn't help but frown. His face darkened, and he turned to Lloyd.

"Master Griffin, just because your disciple cannot do it, it doesn't mean that my disciple cannot do it too. I told you before that my disciple is very talented!"

Lloyd's doubt of Gerald was similar to doubting his own ability, so Chace would not just let Lloyd criticize Gerald.

Besides, Gerald indeed had the ability to do so. He had witnessed it himself. Otherwise, he wouldn't have come to see the Talisman Great Master. Was he that free?

"Lloyd, be quiet!"

Chadrick's face darkened, and he ordered Lloyd sternly.

Lloyd did not dare to make a sound anymore, and he quieted down immediately, shutting his mouth tightly.

"Chace, are you aware of the consequences that you will have to face if you are lying?"

Chadrick then reminded Chace. This was no laughing matter, so he hoped that Chace would think about it before making a decision. It was still not too late for him to take back his words.

"Great Master, I, Chace Hunt, would never lie. My disciple certainly has the talent!"

Chace replied firmly to Chadrick.

"Well, since that's the case, I shall test him myself. If he truly is what you claim him to be, I shall grant him the title of a One-rank Talisman Master!"

Chadrick proposed to Chace after hearing what he had said.

Chace turned around and looked at Gerald, who was standing behind him.

Gerald was calm, not nervous at all.

“Gerald, are you ready?” asked Chace.

Gerald nodded, indicating his agreement to the test.

Seeing Gerald agree to the test, Chace was reassured. He knew Gerald would be able to do it.

Then, Chace, Lloyd, and Nolan stood aside, and Chadrick prepared a brush and talisman paper for Gerald. He put them in front of Gerald.

“My test is very simple. If you can produce a high quality talisman on the spot, you will pass the test! If you fail, it will mean that your tutor is bluffing, and he will be expelled from the Talisman Union. You will both lose your memberships of the Talisman Union!”

Chadrick explained the rules of the test briefly and reminded him about the consequences.

“I understand, Great Master. I shall prove it to you!”

Gerald agreed to it without a second thought.

Chapter 1635

“Alright, let’s begin!”

Chadrick nodded and signaled for him to start.

Once he had said that, Gerald quickly took the brush and started drawing on the talisman paper.

Gerald drew the patterns from his memory. He had decided to give a hard slap to the faces of Lloyd and Nolan so that he could make his tutor proud.

Therefore, Gerald did not plan to produce a high quality secret technique talisman. In fact, he planned to produce a higher quality one, that was, a rare quality secret technique talisman, which was none other than the golden dragon talisman that he had succeeded in doing today.

However, there was one concern he had. He had only succeeded in drawing the golden dragon talisman after practicing a few times. He wasn't sure if he would be successful this time.

So, Gerald knew that he had to take a chance.

Honestly speaking, producing a high-quality secret technique talisman was not a problem at all to Gerald. He could draw the patterns easily. However, he knew he could not prove his ability too easily. Since he wanted to prove his ability, he had to amaze them.

A few minutes later, Gerald finished drawing the talisman and threw it into the sky.

The talisman turned into a golden ray and disappeared.

It was a failure!

Seeing this, Chace was dumbfounded.

Chadrick cocked his eyebrows, his face darkening, and Lloyd didn't waste the chance to worsen the situation.

"Just as I have told you earlier, Great Master. Chace and his disciple were bluffing!" Lloyd shouted at Chadrick.

Gerald looked very grave. He knew what consequences he would bring to Chace if he failed.

“Great Master, I was too nervous and accidentally made a mistake. Please give me one more chance!”

Gerald begged.

“If you can’t do it, you just can’t, even if you are given a second chance. Great Master, you must punish Chace and his disciple severely!”

When Lloyd heard it, he barked at Gerald angrily and suggested this to Chadrick.

Chadrick fell into deep thought. In truth, he had somehow guessed what Gerald was drawing on the talisman paper based on his strokes and the pattern, and he had thought that the golden ray was unusual.

“Okay, I will give you one more chance!”

After quite some time, Chadrick agreed to give Gerald another chance.

Gerald and Chace were delighted when they heard that. On the other hand, Lloyd was very irritated and wondered why Chadrick would make such a decision.

Gerald started drawing a talisman for the second time.

This time, he knew he had to succeed, or he would be done for.

Gerald closed his eyes tightly. He was not in a rush to start drawing, but he was searching in his mind on how he had drawn the pattern this morning.

“Just forget it if you can’t do it. Don’t waste time anymore!”

Seeing Gerald hesitate to move his brush, Lloyd sneered at him again.

Gerald opened his eyes wide suddenly and started drawing on the talisman paper like the wind.

Every stroke Gerald drew on the talisman paper looked very strange.

Meanwhile, Chadrick, who was watching the way Gerald did his strokes from above, was shocked at what he was seeing.

“This is...”

Chadrick couldn’t help but feel that the strokes and patterns Gerald was drawing seemed very familiar.

The next second, Gerald finished drawing the talisman. The moment he put down his brush, he threw the talisman into the air.

A brilliant golden ray emanated from the talisman, instantly illuminating the whole Great Master Hall, and a golden dragon surged out from the golden light and surrounded Gerald.

Chapter 1636

“A talisman of perfect quality!”

Chace exclaimed in great surprise when he saw this.

The golden light was shining brightly with the purple qi drifting from the east, and the white mist surrounded them. It was a magnificent scene.

That's right. Gerald had actually produced a perfect quality secret technique talisman!

"This. How could this be possible?!"

Lloyd, who was standing on the side, could not believe what he was seeing. He shouted with his eyes wide open.

Although he did not believe it, it did not change the fact that it was right before his eyes.

At the same time, Chadrick was equally flabbergasted. He didn't expect that Gerald would actually produce a perfect quality secret technique talisman as he knew perfectly well that even he himself was unable to do so.

"You. How did you do it?"

Chadrick asked Gerald immediately.

"Great Master, I just kept practicing and exploring. Before I came here, I had already produced a rare-quality talisman successfully!" Gerald answered right away.

Hearing his answer, Chadrick nodded in satisfaction.

"Chace, your disciple is indeed extremely talented. From now on, he will be a One-rank Talisman Master in the Talisman Hall!"

Then, he praised Chace and granted Gerald the title.

A One-rank Talisman Master. This meant that Gerald was now enjoying the same status as a tutor, and this honorable status was very precious. When he received the title as a One-rank Talisman Master from the Talisman Hall, it would also mean that his status would be very high in the whole of Jaellatra.

“Great Master, you...”

Lloyd was naturally the first person who was unwilling to accept this. He approached Chadrick immediately as if wanting to say something.

Chadrick knew what was going through Lloyd’s mind. Without waiting for him to say anything, he stopped him first. “Lloyd, I know what you want to say, but this matter is settled. Alright, off you go now. I still have things to do!”

Lloyd felt helpless, but he could only swallow his anger and leave with his disciple.

As for Chace and Gerald, the tutor and the disciple were overjoyed, thinking that Lloyd was shooting himself in the foot.

After leaving the Talisman Hall, Chace smiled at Gerald and praised him. “Gerald, you are now a tutor in the Talisman Hall! Your future depends on yourself now.”

“Master, even though I have become a tutor, you are still my teacher!”

Gerald looked at Chace with an unwavering gaze as he spoke.

As the saying went, once a teacher, always a teacher.

If it wasn't for Chace being willing to accept him as his disciple, how could he have achieved such an accomplishment?

Hearing Gerald's words, Chace felt warm in his heart. He had indeed chosen the right disciple.

Very soon, Chace brought Gerald to report to the Talisman Hall to retrieve the badge of a One-rank Talisman Master. Gerald had indeed become a tutor in the Talisman Hall!

Once everything had been settled, Gerald went to the residence of the Zahn family.

Gerald hadn't seen Nori since the last time she had come, so he wondered what she had been doing over these few days.

Now, Gerald was already a familiar guest of the Zahn family, so no one would stop him from entering and leaving anymore.

When he reached the hall, he saw Yoshua talking to his butler.

"Master Zahn!"

Gerald entered the lobby and greeted Yoshua politely.

"Gerald, you are here. Quick, come and have a seat. How're your studies at Master Hunt's place?"

When Yoshua saw Gerald, his face lit up, and he asked Gerald with concern immediately.

Chapter 1637

“Wow, this is the badge of a One-rank Talisman Master. So, you have become a tutor?”

Before Gerald could even reply, Yoshua had already noticed the One-rank Talisman Master on his chest and cheered in surprise.

Yoshua could easily recognize the badge because Chace Hunt had a Two-rank Talisman Master badge.

“Yes, Master Zahn. However, I must thank you a lot for this. It was you who gave me such a good opportunity to become the disciple of Master Hunt and get to where I am today!”

Gerald was an appreciative person. It was only natural that he would be grateful to Yoshua.

“Ha! Ha!”

“It’s not a big deal at all. It’s the result of your hard work!”

Yoshua waved his hand at Gerald as he laughed.

Seeing Gerald successful made Yoshua happy. At least it made him feel that he had not helped the wrong person.

“Oh right, Master Zahn. Why don’t I see Nori anywhere?”

Gerald then asked Yoshua in confusion.

Nori had always stayed by Yoshua’s side. However, she was not with him today, which made Gerald feel

very strange.

“Now that you’ve mentioned Nori, she’s been out these few days, saying that she was going to join an expedition to the holy mountain to search for a thousand-year-old panax ginseng.

Yoshua answered Gerald’s query.

“A thousand-year-old panax ginseng? What is that?”

Gerald was confused.

“It’s an ancient herb that only grows once every one thousand years. It’s more precious than ginseng!”
Yoshua explained.

This triggered Gerald’s curiosity. But why hadn’t Nori told him about this? Moreover, why was she interested in this ancient herb? There had to be some unknown secrets in this matter.

“Master! Master!”

Right at that moment, a servant came running from the door hurriedly as he shouted for Yoshua anxiously.

“What happened? Why are you so anxious?”

Yoshua frowned and asked.

“The young lady... It’s about Young Lady and the rest! They met with an accident in the holy mountain! I

just heard that there was an avalanche in the holy mountain recently, and a lot of snow fell down the mountainside. The situation is very worrying!”

The servant quickly told Yoshua the news he had just received.

Yoshua was stunned after hearing the news.

“You... You can’t possibly be joking around with this matter?!”

Yoshua questioned him in disbelief. His daughter had left just two days ago, and now, he was already receiving such horrible news. It was truly hard for him to accept it.

Just as he said that, a group of armored men entered through the door.

These men crowded into the house quickly. Among them, there was a leader, and he was wearing a black military uniform.

“Hello, Master Zahn. I’m the captain of the army of Jaellatra, Patrick Wang. I’m here today regarding the matter of the young lady of your family and her expedition team in the holy mountain!”

Patrick stood before Yoshua and told him with a serious face.

Now, Yoshua knew that it was not fake news, but something had truly happened to them.

Yoshua’s legs gave out. Luckily, his butler and servant, who were standing behind him, quickly supported him and prevented him from falling.

On the other hand, Gerald was also very worried. He turned around and left the house immediately. He knew he had to go to the holy mountain and save Nori himself.

Once he had left the residence of the Zahn family, Gerald headed to the main city of Earth Capital. He had to buy some supplies and equipment before heading to the holy mountain. Otherwise, going there alone unprepared was no different than asking for his own death.

Chapter 1638

After preparing for almost two hours, Gerald was fully equipped.

He returned to the residence of the Zahn family once again, and he saw Yoshua and Patrick, who were just about to leave for the army camp nearest to the holy mountain.

Seeing Gerald come back made Yoshua very surprised.

He had previously thought that Gerald did not want to bother about this matter. But now, seeing that he was fully equipped, he knew that the latter had gone to make preparations just now.

“Master Zahn, I hope I can go save Nori as well!”

Gerald looked at Yoshua and said righteously.

Although Gerald and Nori were not romantically involved with each other, he saw Nori as his best friend.

Now that Nori was in a very dangerous situation, Gerald could not just sit still. He had to go and save her.

“Gerald.”

“Master Zahn, Nori is my best friend. I cannot just leave her alone!”

Yoshua wanted to say something, but Gerald interrupted immediately.

Hearing Gerald’s words, Yoshua felt warmth in his heart, thinking that his daughter had made a good friend.

Since Gerald had the intention to do so, he would naturally choose to say yes.

“Captain Wang, can he join the rescue mission?”

Yoshua then looked at Patrick, who was standing beside him, and requested.

Patrick glanced at Gerald. After hesitating for a few seconds, he nodded. “Yes, he can!”

“Thank you very much, Captain Wang!”

Gerald thanked Patrick as well. He had initially thought that Patrick would not agree to it, but now, it looked like it wasn’t the case.

Soon, they arrived at the temporary camp a few miles away from the holy mountain.

Since the weather and condition of the holy mountain were very harsh right now, the rescue team was not able to get close to it. For the sake of safety, they could only build a temporary camp a few miles away from the mountain.

When they arrived at the camp, a group of men was already gathering around a table, discussing the

rescue plan.

“Come, let me introduce you. He is a polar expedition expert, Quest Leane. This is a medical expert, Kaleb Wallor. And this is a geologist, Malcolm Laige.”

Once Patrick walked into the camp, he introduced the three who were already there to Gerald.

“This is Gerald Crawford. He will be one of the members of the rescue team this time!”

Gerald greeted them briefly.

“What’s your expertise, Brother Crawford? The trip to the holy mountain this time is not a simple one!”

Quest asked Gerald right away.

“I don’t know anything!”

Gerald replied calmly.

Hearing this, the three immediately cocked their eyebrows and put on a displeased look on their faces.

“Brother Crawford, if you know nothing, I think you should not join the rescue mission this time. We don’t have the extra energy to take care of you!”

Quest proposed to Gerald with a disapproving tone.

The members of the rescue team were mostly experts in some areas, so they certainly did not want someone who knew nothing to join them.

Hearing this, Gerald couldn't help but frown. He didn't expect that these people would look down upon him.

"Don't worry. I don't need your care nor your help. You should better take care of yourselves!"

Not wanting to be outdone, Gerald refuted.

After that, Gerald turned around and walked out of the tent. He walked to an open space and sat down, packing and checking his equipment.

Quest and the rest did not want to bother about Gerald. It was for the best that Gerald had said that, so they did not need to care about Gerald's life or death.

Chapter 1639

The holy mountain was a few thousand meters above sea level. The higher up the mountain, the lower the temperature and atmospheric pressure would be. Moreover, the condition on the mountain was very harsh now. The wind was fierce, and the snow was heavy. It was very dangerous.

Hence, it could be said that the rescue mission to the holy mountain this time was very risky.

"Everyone, since there will be a Force 6 wind as well as a snowstorm tonight, we have decided to set the departure time at seven o'clock tomorrow morning. I hope that everyone can rest well tonight to conserve your energy!"

Soon, Patrick came and informed Gerald and the rest.

Tonight was going to be a sleepless night.

As the night was getting old, Gerald leaned on his backpack alone and closed his eyes for a short rest.

Just then, he heard something.

Gerald opened his eyes immediately and looked in the direction of the camp Quest and the other two were staying. He saw two figures sneaking out of the tent, and they were acting very cautiously.

Through the darkness, Gerald could see the faces of these two men.

They were none other than Kaleb Wallor and Malcolm Laige.

Seeing this, Gerald couldn't help but chuckle in silence. He didn't expect the two people who had been mocking him this afternoon to be attempting to escape. This was indeed too shameful.

After thinking for a while, Gerald got up and quietly approached the two of them.

"Where are you two going?"

At the next moment, Gerald asked as he appeared behind Kaleb and Malcolm.

Gerald's appearance almost scared them to death. They were so shocked that they fell to the ground.

"You... Why aren't you asleep seeing as it's the middle of the night but instead, you're scaring people here?!"

Kaleb glared at Gerald and shouted with a trembling voice.

“Hah! If I were asleep, how would I be able to see you two escaping?”

Gerald smirked and sneered.

“You... Don’t slander people here. We were just checking the weather!”

At Gerald’s words, Malcolm and Kaleb exchanged glances and refuted, pointing their fingers at Gerald.

“You still don’t want to admit it. How shameless.”

Click!

Right at that moment, the lights came on.

Patrick, Quest, and the rest came out of the tents immediately. They had been awakened by the noise outside.

“What’s wrong?”

Patrick approached them and asked.

“Captain Wang, it looks like you didn’t arrange your men to keep watch at night. These two were in the middle of escaping, and I happened to catch them red-handed!”

Gerald would not hide it for them, and he told Patrick this playfully.

Once Patrick heard him, his face darkened.

Swish!

A figure rushed forward, grabbing the collars of Kaleb and Malcolm's shirts.

It was Quest Leane. He glared at them angrily.

"You cowards! How dare you escape?! I shall teach you a good lesson!"

Quest roared angrily and wanted to beat them up.

Luckily, Patrick and the other men stopped him in time. Otherwise, Kaleb and Malcolm would have been torn apart by Quest. Nobody would have expected this to happen.

"You two, tell me honestly. What is really going on?"

Patrick stopped Quest and asked as he looked at them coldly.

Chapter 1640

"Captain Wang, we... Both of us are just ordinary people! W-we're afraid of dying too, you know...?!" stammered Kaleb as he lowered his head, not even daring to look into Patrick's eyes.

"You...!" growled Quest, growing more infuriated by the second.

"So... Let me get this straight. Both of you are trying to secretly escape just because you're afraid of dying?" said Gerald as he added more fuel to the fire. After all, he didn't really have much of a good

impression on the duo.

Regardless, upon hearing Gerald's words, Kaleb and Malcolm were so embarrassed that they could only further lower their heads.

Boiling mad, Quest then suggested, "People like these two... They should be captured, Captain Wang!"

Upon hearing that, Patrick paused for a moment. Turning back to look at Quest, he then casually said, "...Just... forget it... It's not a crime to fear death!"

Capturing them was a bit unnecessary. After all, the duo hadn't really done anything illegal to warrant Quest's suggestion.

Either way, Patrick didn't really want to force the duo to come along with them so he simply turned back to look at them before saying in a frigid tone, "Whatever the case is, if you're that afraid of dying, then just leave!"

With that said, Patrick then began leading the others way, leaving Kaleb and Malcolm—who were now free to leave—behind.

To Patrick, having them leave early was way better than allowing the timid and terrified men to stay in the long run. By getting the burdens out of the way early, future unnecessary trouble could definitely be avoided.

Regardless, upon realizing that Patrick was granting them permission to leave, both the delighted men then kowtowed—while facing him—before shouting, "Thank you, Captain Wang...! Thank you!"

Hearing that, Quest made a brief glare at them before sneering and returning to the tent.

Gerald himself couldn't be bothered with the two, so he simply carried his backpack before entering the same tent that Quest had.

Noticing Gerald's presence, Quest—who was still angry with the turn of events—then scowled, “How absolutely infuriating...! I truly hadn't expected them to be this afraid of dying!”

Chuckling in response, Gerald then replied, “Well, it's not like I don't get where they're coming from. After all, the duo has little to no experience in adventuring! With that in mind, it's no mystery why they'd be so terrified of undergoing such dangerous affairs!”

“...Hmm? You say that, but aren't you the same as them? Why didn't you run with them?” asked Quest rather curiously. After all, Quest had initially thought that Gerald was similar to people like Kaleb and Malcolm. As it turned out, however, he had been wrong.

“I'm nothing like them! After all, I'm someone who's training to attain spiritual enlightenment!” replied Gerald in a confident tone.

Upon hearing that, Quest instantly got to his feet before staring at Gerald in surprise. After a few seconds, he then said, “...No wonder you didn't leave! To think that you're actually training to attain spiritual enlightenment!”

“Indeed. Regardless, know that since I have a good friend in the adventure team, I'm heading there to save her no matter the costs! Even if I have to risk my life!” explained Gerald as he looked at Quest determinedly.

Hearing that, Quest nodded in satisfaction before stretching out his hand toward Gerald.

Chapter 1641

“I apologize for my earlier bad attitude. With that said, I hope we can cooperate throughout this rescue mission!” said Quest.

Not one to fuss over such small matters, Gerald was starting to feel that Quest was actually a rather nice person. What more, Quest was a professional adventurer with great courage and an adventurous spirit.

With that in mind, Gerald found himself smiling as he returned Quest's handshake while saying, "Likewise. Regardless, allow me to formally introduce myself. Gerald Crawford!"

"Quest Leane!" replied Quest with his own smile.

Following that, both of them then began chatting rather cheerfully till they eventually drifted off to sleep at around three in the morning...

By seven the next morning, all fifteen of the rescue team members had already assembled and were ready to set off for the holy mountain.

Being the pioneer of the group, Quest was the first in line, followed by Gerald, Patrick, then the other members of the team.

Fortunately, the weather was rather good, so the rescue team's journey up the mountain proceeded rather smoothly. Even so, the higher they went, the colder it got. Aside from that, the air pressure was also gradually intensifying.

Sensing that, Patrick and the others quickly made sure to put on oxygen masks. Naturally, Patrick offered one to Gerald as well.

In response, however, Gerald simply said, "It's fine, Captain Wang. I don't need one!"

Such air pressure was nothing to Gerald, and it was evidently nothing to Quest as well since he refused to wear an oxygen mask too. Quest, for one, was a seasoned adventurer, and he was already used to dealing with pressures like these.

Still, he couldn't help but feel slightly concerned over Gerald's safety, so he turned around to ask, "Are you sure you don't want to put one on, Gerald? The pressure's only going to get lower the higher we get, and air will become much scarcer then..."

Hearing that, Gerald simply shook his head before replying, "Don't worry about me. I don't need to wear one!"

Gerald meant every word that he had said. After all, the essential qi in his body actively cushioned the negative effects of the pressure. Due to that, not only was Gerald unaffected by the freezing temperatures, but Gerald was also able to continually maintain his breathing.

With how sure Gerald sounded, Quest didn't say anything else. Even so, he now had a new outlook on Gerald, thinking that the youth was rather different from the others.

Regardless, the rescue team finally arrived at a resting spot after hiking for a little over three hours.

While taking their temporary rest, Patrick double-checked their location before saying, "Alright, we're currently at an altitude of three thousand feet up the holy mountain. From what we've previously gathered, the other adventure team disappeared at around nine thousand and eight hundred feet. With that said, we're only at a third of our journey to where we need to get to!"

"I suggest we try to reach our target location before the weather gets too bad, Captain Wang. After all, the weather conditions up here appear to be much worse than what we had initially anticipated! With that said, even the slightest change in weather will hinder our progress up the mountain!" said Quest as he looked at Patrick.

While—the remaining—six thousand and eight hundred feet may not sound too bad a hike on paper, it was, in fact, extremely far from where they currently were.

What more, while it had taken the group about only three hours to get to three thousand feet high, the

terrain they had to walk through earlier wasn't as bad as what was to come. After all, the higher they went, the more uneven the holy mountain's terrain was going to get. Steep cliffs, for one, would certainly become more frequent, and if they weren't careful, slipping off one wasn't completely out of the question...

With that in mind, the rescue team then set off again after completing their brief rest.

It wasn't long after before the rescue team met with a predicament.

There was no further road to speak of where they currently were! Essentially, that meant that the only way to head forward was to climb a steep cliff before them...

Looking down into the three-hundred-foot deep abyss below him, Gerald could tell that many would definitely feel terror-stricken just from seeing how deep the fall was.

Even so, it wasn't as if the others had any other choice. After all, it would definitely take way too much time and energy for them to head back and attempt to find another road. With that in mind, the steep cliff truly seemed like their only way of progressing.

Thankfully, this wasn't Quest's first rodeo. Quest had scaled cliffs like this before, so it honestly wasn't anything too difficult for him.

With that in mind, everyone then watched as Quest took a rope—with a hook attached to it—before flinging it toward a rock atop the cliff.

After testing how firm the hook had lodged itself into the rock, Quest then easily climbed up the rope...

Chapter 1642

Naturally, scaling the cliff wasn't an issue for Gerald either.

After taking a few steps back, Gerald dashed forward before making a giant leap! Seconds later, the youth then landed right beside Quest!

Upon seeing that, Quest and the others all felt their jaws drop. What immense jumping capabilities! He truly was a person who was training to attain spiritual enlightenment!

Eventually shaking their shock off, the others then quickly began climbing up the rope as well...

It was when most of them had already made their way up the cliff when a sudden roar of thunder could be heard!

Following that, the weather began changing rather rapidly, and soon enough, dark clouds had covered every inch of the sky...

Understanding that the weather was only going to get nastier, Patrick—who was adamant about getting up the cliff last—anxiously instructed, “Everyone, hurry!”

Once everyone had made it to the top, Patrick quickly began climbing the rope as well...

Of course, trouble always came unannounced. The others had considerably worn the rope down, so halfway up, it ended up snapping!

Watching in utter horror as Patrick began falling into the abyss, the other team members instantly began shouting, “Captain Wang!”

Gerald himself quickly untied the rope around his waist before tossing it toward Patrick! Upon coming into contact with the falling man, the rope instantly wrapped itself around him!

Realizing what Gerald had just done, Quest then rushed over to him while shouting to the rest, “Hurry

and help him!”

Hearing that, the rest of the team members quickly snapped out of it and began grabbing the rope as well. After a bit of effort, all of them were successfully able to pull Patrick back up...

Thanks to Gerald’s quick thinking and actions, Patrick was able to avoid a truly horrible fate...

Though he was now safe, Patrick—who was drenched in cold sweat—still found himself shivering slightly. After all, he had thought that it was all over for him just seconds ago. Panting as he walked over to a rock, Patrick then sat on it to slowly recover his cool.

Seeing that, Gerald then walked over to him before squatting by Patrick’s side and asking in a concerned tone, “Are you alright, Captain Wang?”

Still quivering slightly in fear, Patrick then shook his head as he replied, “I... I’m fine... Regardless, thank you, Gerald...! If it wasn’t for you, I’d be dead by now!”

In response, Gerald simply smiled subtly before humbly replying, “There’s no need to thank me. It’s my duty to help a teammate out!”

Despite the touching moment, it was then when snow began falling heavily.

With how frigid the winds were getting, Quest then yelled, “...Things are looking bad. We need to find someplace to settle down first!”

Attempting to scale the mountain in such weather was practically suicide and everyone understood that. While it was true that they were undergoing a rescue mission, it wasn’t big enough an emergency for all of them to risk their lives for. With that in mind, the best they could do at the moment was to seek shelter and wait the snowstorm out.

After looking around for a bit, Quest managed to locate a spacious area underneath a steep cliff.

As all of them quickly—and gladly—entered the area to take refuge, everyone heard as Quest suddenly shouted, “...Hey, look there! There are signs that others have stayed here before!”

Upon hearing that, Gerald and Patrick quickly ran over to Quest’s side.

True to his words, a pile of burned charcoal could be seen there... It was evident that others had made a fire here before.

“The adventure team could have stayed here before in order to avoid a snowstorm!”

Chapter 1643

After squatting to inspect the pile of burnt charcoal for a brief moment, Patrick then said, “...This is still relatively new. The ones who lit the fire should have stayed here around two days ago!”

Hearing that, Gerald and Quest turned to look at each other. This was good news! After all, it at least proved that the adventure team was still alive two days ago!

“...Alright, let’s just take refuge here for the moment. We’ll continue our journey once the snowstorm is over!” said Quest as he laid down his backpack before sitting to conserve energy.

While the rest did the same, Gerald chose to continue inspecting the surrounding cliff area instead. After a while, Gerald called Quest and Patrick over.

“Mr. Leane and Captain Wang, I’ve scouted the surrounding area for a bit and I’ve found that there aren’t any other paths to proceed to. The only way to ascend the mountain from this point on is by climbing. To support that statement, just have a look there. If you squint a little, you can see friction

marks! I'm assuming that's where the people from that adventure team hung their rope!" explained Gerlad as he pointed at the traces.

After hearing all that, both Quest and Patrick agreed with Gerald's analysis.

"Hmm... Tell me, Gerald, how do you say we should proceed with this?" asked Patrick as he turned to look at Gerald.

"Well, from how I see it, our best option right now would be for me and Mr. Leane to head up to scout ahead. You and the others can wait here for us. Once we've located the adventure team, we'll then reunite with all of you! How's that sound?" replied Gerald.

It was a very steep climb, about thirty feet high. With that in mind, Gerald was afraid that a precarious situation—similar to what Patrick had earlier faced—would repeat itself if too many people went scouting.

Regardless, after hearing that, Patrick then turned to look at Quest before asking, "What do you say to that, Mr. Leane?"

"I'll have to agree with Gerald. We'll be scouting ahead then!" replied Quest in agreement.

"Very well, then! Since there aren't any objections, let's just go with that!" said Patrick.

Following that, both Quest and Gerald immediately began getting themselves ready. After packing all the necessary equipment into their backpacks, they returned to the thirty feet high cliff...

Looking up, Quest found himself frowning slightly as he asked, "A bit too high for my tastes... How do you reckon we get up there?"

Quest's concern was warranted since not only was the cliff extremely high, but there also seemed to be very little that looked sturdy enough to be used as leverage. Of course, while Quest found it to be a rather hopeless situation, it wasn't a problem for Gerald.

"Just leave it to me, Mr. Leane!" replied Gerald with a confident smile as he took out a piece of talisman paper as well as a pen.

"...Hmm? Could... it be that you know how to craft secret technique talismans?" asked Patrick—who had followed them there together with the rest of the team to see them off—in a surprised tone.

As a person from Jaellatra, Patrick definitely knew about talismans, and though Gerald didn't reply, Patrick got his answer when the youth began drawing on the talisman paper!

A few seconds later, Gerald tossed his complete talisman into the air... and just like that, the talisman materialized a golden ladder out of thin air!

"After you, Mr. Leane!" said Gerald as he turned to look at the shocked Quest.

Upon hearing his name, Quest quickly snapped out of his shock and began climbing the golden ladder.

Patrick, on the other hand, still had his jaw gaping wide. He hadn't expected Gerald to actually be a Talisman Master who knew how to make his own secret technique talismans! It made Patrick admire Gerald greatly. What more, it explained why Gerald had been so confident in rescuing those people.

Thinking about it, Gerald's presence was definitely an honor to the rescue team. If he hadn't decided to come along, they would've surely faced much more trouble and possibly even fatalities...

Chapter 1644

After bidding farewell to Patrick and the others, Gerald and Quest then began scaling the rest of the holy mountain.

Though it was still snowing rather heavily—with occasional freezing gusts of wind—Gerald and Quest managed to find a cliffside to proceed under. In other words, they had minimal contact with the actual snowstorm.

As they walked on, Quest found himself asking, “What would you say are the survival odds of the adventure team, Gerald?”

“I can’t say for sure, but I think they should still be alive. I’m assuming they’re currently trapped someplace on this mountain!” replied Gerald with a hopeful tone.

Gerald, for one, certainly hoped that they were still alive. He couldn’t bear the thought of Nori dying in this snowstorm.

Shaking the thoughts off, Gerald then asked, “Regardless, how much progress have we made, Mr. Leane?”

“From what I can gather, we should now be at an altitude of seven thousand and five hundred feet. If that’s the case, then we should be two thousand feet from where the adventure team disappeared! Judging from our current progression speed, we’ll need about two more hours to reach that place!” replied Quest as he read out the information that his smartwatch was showing.

While they were certainly much closer to the area now, the journey there was still far from over...

At that moment, an ear-piercing roar of thunder could be heard! The sound was so loud that the entire mountain instantly began shaking slightly!

Realizing what was happening, Quest quickly said, “This... This could be the sign of an avalanche!”

Hearing that, Gerald instantly began looking around to survey the area... But to his dismay, there was nothing to shield them against an incoming avalanche! Sandwiched between two stone walls, both of them knew that if they didn't think quickly, they were going to be hit by the avalanche and subsequently thrown into the abyss at the end of the valley! By that point, they'd surely be in pieces!

"There doesn't seem like there's anywhere to hide, Gerald...! What should we do...?!" asked Quest rather anxiously.

Despite being a person with abundant adventuring experience, Quest was now feeling slightly terrified in this seemingly hopeless situation.

After a few seconds, Gerald then quickly retrieved his talisman-making kit before saying, "Don't worry, I have an idea!"

With that said, Gerald rapidly began drawing on the talisman! The second he was done, Gerald then threw it forward, prompting a golden ray of light to envelop both of them!

A shield of light formed just in time as the avalanche came crashing down on them! Thankfully, the golden shield was sufficient in guiding the avalanche away from them, keeping Gerald and Quest safe!

After what seemed to be an eternity, no further sounds could be heard. Still safe underneath a layer of snow, Gerald then cleared out the snow above them... They were safe!

Once Quest climbed out with a huff, Gerald then followed after.

Sighing in relief, Quest—who was honestly still quivering a little—then said, "Thank god you're here with me, Gerald... Otherwise, I'd surely be doomed!"

Smiling back at him, Gerald simply shook his head in silence before resuming the journey up the mountain together with Quest. It was about an hour and a half later when they finally reached the

spot...

Arriving half an hour earlier than anticipated, the area they were in was at an altitude of nine thousand and eight hundred feet. Now much nearer to the mountain's peak, Gerald and Quest began scanning the area below them. Unfortunately, thick, misty clouds—that were everywhere below them—covered most of their view. Due to that, neither of them was able to find any hints of what could have happened to the adventure team...

After a while, Quest walked over to Gerald before asking with a deep frown on his face, "...There doesn't seem to be any traces of them being here at all... Could it be that nothing really happened to them here...?"

Chapter 1645

Hearing that, Gerald simply closed his eyes in silence, spreading his divine sense out to scan through the rest of the mountain top...

Sadly, the range of his divine sense was rather limited, so he was only able to scan up to a few hundred feet. Though that wasn't a small range by any means, Gerald still wasn't able to find any traces of the adventure team after quite some time.

Eventually, Quest found himself asking, "...Say... Do you think that the adventure team isn't here because... they've headed further up the mountain...?"

Upon hearing that, Gerald turned to look at Quest. Though the suggestion sounded rather preposterous, it wasn't completely out of the question either. After all, since there were zero traces of the adventure team here, the only other way they could've headed to—without bumping into the rescue team on their way up—was further up the mountain...

"...That could be the case. Since we're already here anyway, let's proceed further up the mountain to check!" replied Gerald in agreement.

With that, both of them then continued scaling the mountain...

Since he could've very well died earlier without Gerald's intervention, Quest now had total trust in Gerald. He felt that as long as he remained close to Gerald, he would surely make it out safely...

Regardless, after walking for a while—with gentle breezes and snowflakes caressing their cheeks the entire time—the duo eventually arrived eleven thousand feet above sea level...

Upon arrival, they were immediately greeted by the sight of a cave. With how pitch dark it was inside, Gerald and Quest found themselves instantly wary of it.

Standing at the mouth of the cave, Quest found himself saying, "How odd... A cave in the middle of nowhere!"

"Indeed... Well, let's go in and have a look around!" replied Gerald as he began walking into the cave.

After a few steps in, both of them took out their glow sticks before activating them. Now having a light source each, the duo then proceeded further into the cave...

Though the cave was quiet, it was also quite damp. With that said, occasional drops of water could be heard every once in a while as they walked on.

Eventually, both of them came to a sudden halt when they saw a faint orange glow from within the cave... It appeared to be the light of a campfire, and the duo could see flickering shadows from time to time.

Looking at each other, Gerald and Quest felt that they must have finally located the adventure team.

After swiftly making their way toward the light source, the duo was greeted by the sight of several

sleeping people lying against the cave's stone walls.

Just as they had thought, they had finally located the adventure team! Gerald was made extra sure of this when—after scanning through the people—he saw that Nori was among them!

“Nori!” shouted Gerald.

Hearing that sudden shout, everyone jolted awake, and this included Nori.

Upon realizing who had called out to her, Nori instantly teared up as she cried out, “G-Gerald...!”

Quickly getting to her feet, the girl then ran over before embracing Gerald tightly...

It took her a while to calm down, but once she did, Nori looked at him in surprise as she asked, “But... what are you even doing here, Gerald...?”

Realizing that she hadn't anticipated him to come over, Gerald then explained, “Well, after finding out that something had happened to you and your adventure team, I came over with a rescue team that was tasked with locating your group!”

“...Does... that mean that you came over just to save me...?” asked Nori as she stared straight into Gerald's eyes expectantly.

In response, Gerald simply revealed a gentle smile and nodded, not seeing any reason to deny it.

Upon hearing that, Nori was instantly overjoyed. After all, the fact that Gerald had come all the way here just to save her meant that he still cared about her.

Still, she truly hadn't expected him to come here in the first place since Nori was sure that she had never even mentioned her trip to the holy mountain to him.

With that in mind, Nori then curiously asked, "...Speaking of which, how did you even know I was here?"

"Well, I found out when I headed to your manor and your father told me about it," replied Gerald.

"I see... But hold on, doesn't the fact that you came here mean that your talisman crafting training with Master Hunt got disrupted?" asked Nori in a slightly worried tone.

After all, it wasn't easy for Gerald to get accepted to be his disciple in the first place. With that in mind, Nori truly hoped that she wouldn't be the reason Gerald lost his chance to continue being Master Hunt's disciple.

To her surprise, however, Gerald simply chuckled before gently patting Nori on the head.

Revealing his First-rank Talisman Master badge—which had been tucked in the inside of his jacket—Gerald then said, "Worry not, I've already become a master! This here is proof!"

"A First-rank Talisman Master Badge?! It's barely been half a month! You really are something else, Gerald!" exclaimed Nori in her disbelief as her eyes lit up.

To think that he was able to attain that rank so quickly... That just showed how capable and powerful he truly was! How admirable!

"Speaking of which, I heard from your father that you came over to look for some ancient herb. The

thousand-year-old panax ginseng, if I remember correctly,” asked Gerald as he looked at Nori with a curious gaze.

Nodding in response, Nori then said, “That’s the one! It’s an ancient herb that only grows every few thousand years. Aside from that, it can only be found on this mountain! With that in mind, I followed the others here after hearing that it was about time it grew again! Unfortunately, we met with an avalanche before we were even able to locate it! It’s almost as if we were destined to never be able to find it!”

Watching as Nori sighed in resignation, Gerald then thought for a while before replying, “Your lives are much more important! Still, do you have any idea what the ginseng herb looks like?”

“But of course I do!” replied Nori as she fished out a photograph from her backpack before showing it to Gerald.

Looking at it, Gerald was greeted by the sight of a white and pristine flower that had petals that resembled ice crystals. The sight of it alone was enough to make anyone feel that it was something extremely precious. No wonder Nori and the others had been so keen on looking for it...

“What does the herb do?” asked Gerald, feeling that such a rare and valuable-looking herb must have had great practical use.

“Well, it’s said that the thousand-year-old panax ginseng can be used to make a kind of pellet known as the rejuvenating pellet! The pellet itself is said to be capable of bringing the dead back to life!” whispered Nori.

“Really?” asked Gerald in slight disbelief.

Though he was a person who was still training to attain spiritual enlightenment, Gerald understood there was still a lot he didn’t know about this mysterious world... Even so, a pellet that was capable of bringing back the dead? That was a little too farfetched, even for him. After all, even people as strong as

he was weren't able to bring the dead back to life.

Shrugging, Nori then said that it was strictly just a rumor. Even she wasn't sure how authentic that claim was.

At that moment, Quest walked over to the duo before reporting, "After some checking around, I've found that only a few of the team members have suffered minor injuries. The rest are thankfully fine. With that said, we can pretty much pack up and begin leaving this place!"

Chapter 1647

"That's great to hear! And I agree, the sooner we leave, the better!" replied Gerald.

Now that they had found the adventure team in one piece, they needed to begin hiking down the same way they had come up with in order to reunite with the rest of the rescue team. Once that was done, they'd begin descending the mountain...

While Gerald was still rather curious about the thousand-year-old panax ginseng, he didn't want to risk everyone's lives just to look for it. Besides, it wasn't even a proven fact that it was really able to revive the dead. With that in mind, the adventure team then began making their way down the mountain.

As the saying went, descending a mountain was always easier than ascending one. Adding that to the fact that Gerald and Quest were providing their aid, the journey downward became much easier to bear. With that in mind, it took the group only half an hour to descend halfway down the mountain.

Ten minutes before they could reunite with Patrick's group, however, a few white mountain wolves suddenly made an appearance!

"W-wolves?!" shouted several of the people from the adventure team as they immediately began bolting down the mountain in fear!

Gerald himself turned to face Quest before instructing, "Quest! Lead the others away first! I'll deal with

these wolves!”

Hearing that, Quest then replied, “Alright, but be careful! Make sure you return in one piece!”

With that, Quest instantly began overseeing that the rest made it down safely. Once most of them were at a safe distance, Quest turned back to look at how Gerald was doing... Only to see all the wolves charging toward the youth!

At that moment, Quest—and Nori who had turned back to check on Gerald—could only stare wide-eyed as Gerald and the wolves plunged down the valley together!

“G-Gerald...!” cried out Nori, her heart filled with excruciating pain as she watched him disappear from sight.

Though Quest was just as shocked by the turn of events, he quickly began dragging Nori by her arm to regroup with the others from the adventure team.

“L-let go...! I need to go look for Gerald...!” yelled Nori as Quest quickly began leading the others back to where Patrick was.

Though Nori tried her hardest to pry free from Quest’s grip, Quest was definitely not about to allow her to put herself in danger. With that in mind, he momentarily tied her wrists with a rope to ease leading her down with the rest.

Despite that, the now teary-eyed Nori still attempted to struggle free of her constraints as she wailed, “Please...! He’s definitely still alive...! Please, let me go look for him...!”

Ignoring her wails, everyone eventually made it back to where the rescue team was...

Upon seeing how depressed Nori looked and realizing that Gerald wasn't present, Patrick found himself asking, "...What's wrong? Where's Gerald?"

Lowering his head, Quest took a moment before replying, "...While descending the mountain, we bumped into a few white wolves... Gerald fought against them to give us room to escape... However, at the very last seconds, all the wolves simultaneously charged at him, and all of them fell into the valley...!"

"...W-what...?" muttered Patrick who was so shocked that he wasn't even able to say anything else for a moment. After all, who could've anticipated for such an accident to happen...?

Even so, the adventure team was successfully rescued. In other words, the mission was a success.

With that in mind, Patrick quickly shook his shock off before declaring, "...Let's descend the mountain first. Once we get everyone to safety, we'll form another rescue team to start looking for Gerald!"

Hearing that, everyone was forced to agree. After all, they were all well aware that they weren't out of danger just yet. What more, there just wasn't enough human resources to launch an immediate search party. With that in mind, the best move at the moment was for them to return to the bottom of the mountain before deciding their next step.

Nobody even knew whether Gerald was still among the living...

As the group began descending the mountain, Gerald himself could be seen lying silently atop some thickets in the deepest parts of the holy mountain...

Chapter 1649

Scattered around him, were the carcasses of the white wolves from before that had died upon impact.

With how tough Gerald's body was, it was no wonder why he had not only survived, but he barely suffered any injuries! Due to that, it wasn't long after before he slowly awoke...

Checking to see if he had suffered any injuries, Gerald was delighted to find out that his body was a-okay.

After hopping off the thickets, Gerald then retrieved his small knife and began slicing the meat off the white wolves. Since he didn't know how much longer he was going to remain stuck here, Gerald knew that he had to stock up on food while he could.

Once he had gathered enough, Gerald began walking around to gather his bearings.

What he was able to witness soon after, however, was nothing short of a utopia. Staring in amazement, it was the first time Gerald had ever seen such a beautiful place. It was so beautiful, in fact, that Gerald simply knew that such a place couldn't exist anywhere else.

As he continued walking around the fairyland-like place, Gerald was surprised to suddenly hear a gentle and almost ethereal female voice saying, "Who's there?"

Turning to face the source of the voice, Gerald was immediately greeted by the sight of a woman—who had a white, muslin dress on and a long sword in hand—hovering out from the forest...

Stopping close to Gerald, he then watched as she pointed the sword toward him.

Rather than being afraid, Gerald was more stunned than anything. To think that such a flawless-looking woman with such pure temperament would actually be in this place!

After staring at her for a while longer, Gerald eventually snapped out of it before replying, "...I... fell from the holy mountain and somehow wound up here!"

Upon hearing that, the charming woman raised a slight brow. Looking at him rather doubtfully, she then asked, "And... you're telling me falling all the way down here didn't hurt you at all?"

She was right to feel doubtful. After all, Gerald looked perfectly fine despite his claims!

"There's a reason for that! You see, I'm a person who's training to attain spiritual enlightenment! Due to that, such heights aren't really a big deal to me!" explained Gerald.

"...Are you really someone who's training to attain spiritual enlightenment...?" asked the woman, almost as though she wanted to be absolutely sure of his claim...

After seeing how determinedly Gerald nodded in response, the woman felt that he was probably telling the truth. Deciding to believe him for now, she then lowered her sword before sheathing it...

Seeing that she was now being less vigilant toward him, Gerald took the chance to ask, "...If I may, could I know who you are? Also, why are you here? And what even is this place...?"

"...My name is June Lovelybite, and I'm the guardian of Magic Land, the place you're currently in!" replied June in a casual tone.

"...I beg your pardon, Magic Land...?" muttered Gerald, feeling utterly bewildered. To think that such a place existed within Jaellatra!

It appeared that Jaellatra still had many secrets that had yet to be discovered... Jaellatra truly was a mysterious place...

Regardless, June then prompted Gerald to follow her. After flying together for a bit, they eventually arrived at a secluded house...

"That's where I live. I'll allow you to rest here for a night. Once dawn comes, I'll lead you out of this place!" said June.

"How... long have you even been living here, June...?" asked Gerald.

From what he had been able to gather, June simply didn't feel like a human who belonged to the real world. If he was going to be honest, she seemed more like some ancient fairy...

"Two thousand years or so."

Chapter 1650

The second he heard that, Gerald's eyes immediately widened. Though he thought that he had heard wrong, he quickly realized that that wasn't the case.

Two thousand years... To think that this young-looking woman was at least two thousand years old...! How terrifying! And to think that she had stayed here—remaining completely undiscovered—throughout that period! What kind of person even was June...?

Had he not fallen into the valley, Gerald could've very well have missed her as well...

Seeing that Gerald had no further questions, June took the chance to ask, "Now then... enough about me. Why did you come to the holy mountain?"

Upon hearing that, Gerald recalled why Nori and the others had hiked up the mountain in the first place. With that in mind, Gerald then replied, "I came here to look for an ancient herb known as the thousand-year-old panax ginseng!"

"You... came here looking for that herb...? What do you need it for? Are you trying to create a rejuvenating pellet?" asked June as she frowned slightly while looking at Gerald.

"Oh? Do you know anything about it?" asked Gerald who was now sure that June knew more about the herb than he did.

"The thousand-year-old panax ginseng is an extremely valuable herb in Magic Land... After all, it only grows once every thousand years. With that in mind, it's currently about time it grew again!" replied June.

Hearing that, Gerald found it almost inconceivable! To think that the herb Nori was looking so hard for was in Magic Land all along! No wonder they weren't able to find it on holy mountain!

"...Truth be told, what I said was only partially true. You see, I came here on a rescue mission to save a friend who found herself in danger while looking for that herb... I don't really know much about that herb, and I just happened to get to where I am by chance!" said Gerald, not wanting June to continue misunderstanding his reason for being here.

While Gerald could tell that June had only entered the First-soul-rank in the Sage Realm—which meant that there was no way she was ever going to be able to defeat him—Gerald wasn't a vicious person. With that in mind, there was no way he was going to attack June over that herb.

Whatever the case was, after hearing what Gerald had to say, June gave him a long stare

before turning around while stating, "...Come with me!"

Doing as she instructed, both of them soon arrived at a rather large garden... and within it, several flowers that had petals resembling ice crystals could be seen...

His eyes now widened, Gerald realized that the garden was filled with thousand-year-old panax ginsengs!

"Those are the herbs you seek!" declared June as Gerald continued staring at the beautiful flowers that looked exactly like the one that Nori had showed him in her photo.

After a while, Gerald turned to look at June before asking, "...Could you tell me what the herb is specifically used for...? Why is it so valuable in the first place?"

Laughing in response, June then revealed a faint smile before explaining, "As I said before, it's used to make rejuvenating pellets, and they can be used to bring the dead back to life! With that said, you tell me if they're valuable or not!"

Hearing that, Gerald now realized that the rumors Nori had heard weren't exaggerated in the least. By refining thousand-year-old panax ginsengs, rejuvenating pellets could truly be made!

"Then... has a rejuvenating pellet ever been made...?" asked Gerald.

Giving no verbal reply, June instead took out a scroll from one of her sleeves before handing it to Gerald.

Curious, Gerald opened the scroll and slowly began scanning through it... only to find himself getting increasingly stunned the more he read!

The scroll recorded every single time rejuvenating pellets had been created as well as where they were made... Despite there only being three pellets to have ever been made, every time one was brought into existence, major disasters were always imminent! With that in mind, rejuvenating pellets were definitely categorizable as ominous items...

Chapter 1651

So that's why the herbs had been kept so well hidden from the rest of the world... June was even here to constantly stand guard over the thousand-year-old panax ginsengs!

"Nobody should ever get their hands on the herbs... Otherwise, catastrophe will be sure to follow! I'm sure you can understand that, right?" said June as she stared at Gerald.

Now understanding the consequences that could happen, Gerald simply nodded as he replied, "I understand. Don't worry, I won't take any of them!"

"I'm glad to hear that. Regardless, I'll be giving you something to express my gratitude!" said June as she gracefully waved her hand, prompting a small, cubic treasure box of sorts to materialize within her palm...

After receiving the treasure box from June, the curious Gerald wondered what she had just given him. Carefully prying the box open, Gerald was greeted by the sight of a single tiny pellet inside...

Looking up at June, Gerald then said, "...This..."

"That's a rejuvenating pellet, and it's the only one I constantly keep with me. I can sense how strong you are, so I'll be leaving this pill with you. May it be useful to you!" replied June.

Gerald was honestly flabbergasted by this turn of events. After all, June was actually willing to give him such an invaluable thing. This was the only existing rejuvenating pellet for heaven's sake!

"I... I appreciate that you're giving me such a precious gift... I... How should I even thank you...?" asked Gerald, honestly feeling that he didn't deserve to be given such an invaluable item out of the blue.

"There's no need to thank me!" replied June rather casually.

Following that, she led Gerald away from her garden and back to her home...

It wasn't long after when night fell...

Despite how dark the sky had gotten, the inside of a temporary camp—that had been set up quite a distance from the holy mountain—was still brightly lit...

While Quest and the others had made it back to the camp in one piece—and were currently inside that tent—, everyone had solemn expressions on their faces.

After witnessing what had happened to Gerald, everyone was either absent-minded or filled with overwhelming grief at the moment...

Nori herself was sitting outside alone. Staring intently at the holy mountain, she could only hope that Gerald would suddenly appear in the distance and begin running toward her...

At that moment, Yoshua's voice could suddenly be heard shouting, "Nori!"

Rushing toward his daughter, Yoshua felt like a massive load had just been lifted off his chest when he realized that she was doing fine.

Staring at Yoshua with teary eyes, Nori got to her feet and embraced her father before saying, "...Dad... Gerald... he... He fell into the valley...!"

"...What? Gerald fell into the valley? Nori, please give me more details!" replied the now trembling Yoshua as he stared wide-eyed at his daughter.

If Gerald was truly gone... then how was he going to explain all this to Chace and the Talisman Union...?

Gerald had just become a First-rank Talisman Master in the Talisman Union too! The thought of him dying so soon after that... It was shocking, to say the least...

Chapter 1652

Following that, Nori began telling her father what had happened on the holy mountain... By the end of her tale, even Yoshua found the turn of events slightly hard to believe.

To think that Gerald had sacrificed his safety just to protect the adventure team from those white wolves... What a truly heroic act...

Patting his daughter's back, Yoshua then consoled, "Don't worry, Nori. Gerald will definitely make it back safely!"

Nodding in response, Nori hoped with all her heart that Gerald would make a safe return as well...

Meanwhile in Magic Land, Gerald himself was having a meal while chatting with June,

completely oblivious to what was happening in the outside world.

Not even knowing how anxiously Nori and the others were awaiting his return, Gerald took a sip of tea before looking toward June and asking, "Speaking of which... Have you been guarding this place this entire time? Could it be that you've never left this place before...?"

Shaking her head in response, June then said, "I'd love to go out myself, honestly... Unfortunately, I'm simply unable to do so!"

"What do you mean by that?"

"Call it a... barrier of sorts. A barrier made just for me... Since I've been given the responsibility of guarding Magic Land, I'm incapable of going past that barrier... Not to worry though, anyone aside from me can still go past it..." replied June as she sighed.

Living here alone for so long without even the slightest contact with the outside world... It must've been painful...

While Gerald couldn't quite pinpoint how much pain June was in when she said that, he could tell that she really wanted to leave this place...

Even so, Gerald personally hoped that June wouldn't enter the outside world. After all, things out there were much more dangerous and viler compared to the conditions within Magic Land. While thinking about that, Gerald also found himself hoping that other outsiders wouldn't be able to find this place.

After all, with so many thousand-year-old panax ginsengs here, their discovery by the public would definitely cause a massive uproar. To prevent all that chaos in the first place, it was best that some things remained unfound and subsequently unchanged...

Late into the night, Gerald—who had been leaning against his chair for a while—eventually dozed off... It was a nice, calming slumber, and Gerald hadn't felt this comfortable in quite a while...

It was around dawn when he was awoken by June's voice saying, "Are you awake...?"

Opening his eyes, Gerald saw that June was sitting before him.

"I am now... You're quite the early bird as well I see..." replied Gerald.

"Indeed. Regardless, since you're already awake, let's get you out of this place..." said June.

Having no objections to that, it suddenly came across Gerald's mind that he had technically been 'missing' for the entire night ever since he fell into the valley. With that in mind, he was now worried about how anxious Nori and the others must be feeling at the moment.

Whatever the case was, once they were outside June's house, she took his hand before leaping together with him, soaring high into the sky...

Eventually, both of them landed before a small boulevard of sorts...

Pointing at the boulevard, June then said, "You can leave by walking through here."

"I see... Thank you for everything!" replied Gerald in a gratuitous tone before walking into the boulevard...

As he walked on, the scene before him seemed to suddenly warp... and all of a sudden, he realized that he was no longer in Magic Land! Looking around, Gerald found that he was now in a forest at the foot of the holy mountain...

Though mystified, Gerald knew that he had to keep this location a secret for as long as he lived...

With that, he then began walking out of the forest. It wasn't too long after when he arrived before the temporary camp. Surprisingly, the exit was this close to the camp!

Standing before the camp, Gerald saw that Quest and the others were seriously discussing something inside...

It took them a while to realize, but eventually, Nori found herself compelled to look out of the tent... and once she did, her eyes instantly widened. Gerald... he was standing there...

He was safe...!

Chapter 1653

The second she managed to snap out of her stupefied state, Nori immediately yelled, "G-Gerald...!"

Now teary-eyed, Nori then rushed over and hugged him tightly.

Realizing that Gerald was in one piece, Quest and the others were equally as delighted and surprised.

As they ran over to him as well, Nori was already scanning Gerald from head to toe while asking, "A-are you alright Gerald? Are you hurt anywhere?"

Seeing how worried she was, Gerald could only smile before replying, "Don't worry, I'm fine!"

Hearing that, Nori was so relieved that she found herself gently hitting her small hands against his chest while whining, "You... You really scared me half to death this time...!"

The solace she was now getting after witnessing yesterday's events was simply too much...

As both Patrick and Quest began patting Gerald's shoulders, Quest eventually found himself asking, "Regardless... What happened after you fell? That was a pretty high fall you know?"

Laughing in response, Gerald simply replied, "I was fortunate enough to fall right atop a large tree! That definitely helped break my fall!"

Naturally, Gerald couldn't tell them about Magic Land, and thankfully, the others seemed to believe his story. After all, the important thing to them was that Gerald had returned safely...

Either way, now that he was back, they no longer needed to launch another rescue effort. With that in mind, everyone began packing up to return to Earth Capital...

Upon arriving at the Zahn family manor, Yoshua—who had returned the night before after finding out that his daughter was safe—immediately heaved a sigh of relief when he saw Gerald with the rest of the group.

Once he was before Yoshua, Gerald took the chance to say, "Apologies, Master Yoshua, and Nori, but I have to return to earth for a while!"

Upon hearing that, Nori's mood was instantly dampened as she muttered, "...Oh... You're... going back...?"

After getting so used to having Gerald by her side this entire time, she really didn't like the idea of him leaving... Though she didn't like it, she knew she couldn't really stop Gerald.

Whatever the case was, Yoshua then asked, "I see... When will you be returning here?"

"Probably for quite a while. After all, I've stayed here for some time as well. I still need to keep my other family members company and tell them what I've been doing," replied Gerald with a slight smile.

"Ah, I see... Keeping tabs with your family is important too! Very well, then. Regardless, know that whenever you return to Jaellatra, this is your home. We'll always be waiting for you here!" declared Yoshua with a firm nod.

Upon hearing that, Gerald found himself feeling slightly moved. Aside from his master, Nori and Yoshua were the only other people who treated him so well in Jaellatra... Even so, reminded himself that he couldn't be with Nori.

With that in mind, Gerald then bid farewell before leaving for Earth...

When he got back to earth, he instantly felt a welcoming warmth and familiarity... Though Jaellatra was great in its own way, earth was still his true home...

Regardless, Gerald's first stop was naturally the Sacrasolis Palace. After all, it had been ages since he had last met Mila and his family members, and he missed them dearly.

Upon arriving home, however, Gerald was surprised that neither Mila nor his sister was present...

Thankfully, his parents were there, so Gerald then asked, "Mom, dad, where are Mila and Jessica?"

Chapter 1654

Hearing their son's question, Dylan then replied, "Ah, well, they've both gone to the Laiross State! From what we've been told, Mila appears to have found her biological parents there! With that in mind, she's paying the Smith family there a visit to confirm it!"

"What? The Laiross State? Her biological parents?" muttered Gerald in slight disbelief.

Following that, Gerald left some instructions for his parents before leaving for the Laiross State alone...

Meanwhile, both Mila and Jessica were standing in the hall of the Smith family manor.

The Smiths in the Laiross State were considerably powerful—due to them owning a large business chain—and were one of the more prestigious families here.

Whatever the case was, Mila's sudden arrival was definitely unexpected, to say the least.

"So... You're saying that your name is Mila Smith?" asked a luxuriously dressed woman—with heavy makeup on—as she stared at Mila.

"That's right. I came here looking for Zyre Smith, my biological father!" replied Mila with a determined gaze.

"Humph! That's my father's name, you know? And I've never heard him mentioning having another daughter! Truth be told, I think you're just here to create trouble!" sneered the woman as she pointed angrily at Mila.

Hollie Smith was the daughter of Zyre—the master of the Smith family—, and she was also the second young lady of the Smith family.

Upon hearing that, Mila didn't take her retort personally and simply said, "We'll find out if that's true once your father meets up with me!"

After learning where her biological parents were from Master Ghost, Mila had come all the way here to see if his prediction was true. Worrying that she would get into trouble, Jessica had followed her over as well.

Still, to think that they would be rejected entry right at the manor's door! It was then when they bumped into Hollie.

Either way, it wasn't long after before a middle-aged man and a woman made their appearance.

"What's wrong, Hollie?" asked the man.

"Thank god you're here, dad! This woman's been persistently asking to meet you! She claims that she's your daughter!" explained Hollie.

Before Zyre could even reply, the woman beside him instantly retorted, "I beg your pardon? As if you could ever have two fathers!"

The angered woman went by Chaney Littlebury, and she was Hollie's mother.

Whatever the case was, Zyre found himself frowning slightly by this turn of events. Turning to look at the two strangers, his eyes instantly widened the second he saw Mila.

Realizing how much Zyre's appearance resembled hers, Mila stared at him for a while longer before asking, "...Are... you Zyre? The master of the Smith family...?"

"...I am indeed! Regardless, you... You really look like your mother...!" cried out Zyre.

Upon hearing that, both Chaney and Hollie's expressions darkened.

"What? What do you mean by that, dad? Do you have another woman out there?" asked Hollie while looking her father in the eye.

Chaney herself was already tugging Zyre's arm as she angrily added, "That's what I want to know as well! Did you cheat on me? Is this person really your daughter?!"

Momentarily at a loss of where to even begin, Zyre understood that he couldn't keep this a secret forever. It was finally time to face the music...

Chapter 1655

Upon hearing that, Mila barely said a word. Instead, she simply held onto Jessica's arm before tugging her away.

Not even sure what to do, Zyre could only watch as the two of them left...

Seeing that the duo was gone, Hollie and her mother instantly yanked Zyre into the house with them. After sitting him on a couch, they made sure to properly interrogate him.

As it turned out, Zyre had apparently made out with another woman—who went by the name of Yviene Morish and was Mila's biological mother—before getting married to Chaney. Unfortunately, Zyre's family was unwilling to let them be together. Due to that, after Mila's birth, Yviene left just like that.

Though the memory of her remained for the many years to come, Zyre never mentioned it to a

soul. While he had thought of the possibility of Yviene appearing one day with Mila, he never thought that he would meet his daughter alone under such circumstances.

Regardless, Chaney and Hollie were greatly angered after hearing all that. The truth was, both mother and daughter were assuming that Mila had showed herself—after all this time—with the intent to snatch the properties of the Smiths.

Despite their worry, however, the thought had never even crossed Mila's mind. Regardless, Mila and Jessica soon returned to their hotel...

Sitting alone by the window, Mila found herself shedding tears not long after. To think that her biological father was such a person...

Seeing that, Jessica slowly walked over to Mila's side to console the poor girl. Such incidents were surely difficult to just accept...

Gently patting her back, Jessica then said, "Don't be sad anymore, Mila... Remember, you still have Gerald and us! We're your family now!"

Hearing that, Mila instantly hugged Jessica tight before wailing in tears. Anyone would feel miserable upon hearing her excruciating cries...

Meanwhile, back at the Smith family manor, Hollie and Chaney could be seen discussing something...

"There's definitely a reason why she's showing herself now, Hollie! With that in mind, let's hire some people to get rid of her before she gets too close to your father! Once she's out of the picture, we won't have to fear her threatening us anymore!" declared Chaney as a wicked smile formed on her face.

"I know right? She's definitely here to snatch our family's properties! If we let her, I'm sure she's also going to start demanding to have a place within our family! With that said, we definitely can't allow her to have her way!" growled Hollie, immense hatred in her tone.

Seeing that her daughter saw eye to eye with her, Chaney then whispered something into her ear... By the time she was done, the sinister smiles on their faces grew wider than ever...

As the two continued perfecting their nasty plot, Gerald arrived in the Laiross State.

After contacting Mila and finding out where she was, he immediately rushed over to the hotel room they were currently in.

Upon seeing Gerald, Mila instantly threw herself into his arms, looking very much like a pitiful and frightened white rabbit...

Once all three of them were seated, Mila began telling Gerald about what had happened at the Smith family manor... By the time she was done, Gerald came to understand that Mila's father had had two women with whom he had intercourse with...

With that in mind, Gerald then said, "Honestly, I don't think you should continue looking for your biological father. After all, not only has he already formed a new family, but he's also a terrible father for starting another family after you were born!"

Hearing that, Mila had to agree with Gerald.

At that moment, Mila's phone momentarily rang... Looking at her phone, Mila saw that she had received a message from an unknown contact number...

'Hello, Mila. This is Hollie. I'd like to meet up and have a little chat with you!' said the message.

Finding it odd and surprising that Hollie would take the initiative to ask her out, Mila then looked at Gerald before saying, "It's... a message from Hollie... She apparently wants to meet me!"

"Oh? Let's see what she wants then! I'll go with you!" replied Gerald, sensing that Hollie definitely had ulterior motives.

Upon realizing that Gerald was coming with her, Mila was given an extra boost in confidence. Even if he hadn't chosen to come along, however, Mila was still pretty sure that she would be able to take on anything that Hollie threw at her.

Whatever the case was, after deciding a meeting location with Hollie, Mila and Gerald then left the hotel...

The meeting location itself was what seemed to be a secluded park, and though Gerald came along, he chose to remain in the shadows for the time being.

By the time they got there, Hollie was already at the park.

Not wanting to beat around the bush, Mila then said, "What can I do for you?"

Chuckling in response, Hollie then replied, "Ah, well, I simply wanted to get to know you a little better! After all, I now know that you're my elder sister, and sisters should get along with each other, right?"

Despite the bright smile on Hollie's face, sinister thoughts were the only thing in her mind.

Still, with how differently Hollie was now treating her compared to earlier, Mila could instantly tell that something was wrong. Hollie definitely had something planned for her...

"Look, just tell me what you want already. I know how much you resent me, so let's not waste each other's time, alright?" retorted Mila in a rather cold tone.

Stunned that Mila had seen through her so easily, Hollie was momentarily unable to say a word.

Quickly snapping out of it, Hollie then clapped a few times. If Mila wanted to get straight to the point, so be it!

Following those claps, Mila watched as a few knife-wielding men—who were obviously under Hollie—dashed out from behind the surrounding bushes!

If Mila disappeared from the world, then she wouldn't be able to compete for a place within the Smith family in the first place!

Sneering in response, Mila then added in a contemptuous tone, "From the looks of it, I'm assuming you thought I showed myself to get some status in your family, correct? Still, is this all you've got to stop me?"

"Is that not the truth? Regardless, this is your fault in the first place for coming over out of the blue to threaten my position! Getting rid of you once and for all is the only viable solution!" scoffed Hollie as she glared viciously at Mila.

The second her sentence ended, Hollie then gestured for her men to surround Mila!

Before Mila could even make a move, a silhouette of a person suddenly flashed past her!

A split second later, an explosive sound was heard as a shock wave hit all of Hollie's men!

Eyes now fully widened as she stared at all the fresh corpses that had just flopped to the ground, Hollie found herself quickly going pale. She had disregarded the fact that Mila would have her own men! What a fatal blunder!

Chapter 1657

With those people out of the picture, Gerald then turned to look at the stupefied Hollie who was so terrified that she couldn't even find the strength to move...

Realizing that Gerald was now slowly walking toward her, the quivering Hollie then stuttered, "Y-you...! Don't come this way...! I-I'm from the Smith family...!"

The fact that she thought that she could use her family as an actual threat truly showed how idiotic this girl really was...

Regardless, before anything else could happen, Mila quickly jogged over to Gerald before tugging his sleeve as she said, "Let's just forget about her, Gerald..."

In the end, not only was Hollie still a woman, but she was also the daughter of Mila's biological father. With that in mind, Mila found herself rather reluctant to have anything too bad happen to Hollie.

Hearing that, Gerald then nodded slightly before replying, "...Fine."

However, he still wanted to give Hollie a severe warning, just so she understood that messing with him and Mila would bring about dire consequences.

"Hollie, right? Listen here, if you or the other Smiths ever dare to lay a finger on Mila again, I guarantee that your family will be completely wiped off the face of the earth! Just so you know, I'm a man of my words. Do I make myself clear?" scoffed Gerald.

Not even daring to say a word, Hollie simply nodded frantically.

Seeing that, Gerald then led Mila away...

He wasn't really worried about the corpses since he believed that Hollie and her family could easily dispose of them. As for the worry about exposing him as a murderer, they probably wouldn't dare to do that either. After all, these hooligans were recruited by the Smiths in the first place!

Whatever the case was, Hollie only dared to call her mother—to update her on the situation—once Mila and Gerald were completely out of sight...

By that point, Gerald and Mila had already reunited with Jessica, and following that, the trio quickly left the Laiross State. Once they were out of there, the Smiths would surely be unable to deal with them any longer. What more, they wouldn't be able to hunt Mila down either since Gerald made sure not to leave behind any of their traces...

Either way, it was a full night and day later when the three finally returned to Sacrasolis Palace...

The second they got back, however, Master Ghost instantly met up with Gerald.

Seeing how anxious he was, Gerald couldn't help but ask, "Is there something important you wish to discuss with me about?"

"Indeed! You see, a large portal to another world has just opened! I'd like to know whether

you'll be entering it!" replied Master Ghost.

Upon hearing that, Gerald was momentarily stunned silent. To think that such a bizarre event would occur!

After snapping out of it, Gerald quickly asked, "Where exactly is this portal, Master Ghost?"

Hearing that, Master Ghost then made a few hand gestures... until suddenly, a ray of blue light shot out of one of his fingertips!

With the ray of light flying toward the sky, Master Ghost then said, "The portal is at the Skyreach Stone Tablet within Jaellatra! However, do note that by choosing to enter that world, you'll have to be prepared to lose something!"

Chapter 1658

Hearing that, Gerald simply nodded in agreement...

Fast forward to the next day, Gerald made sure to bid farewell to Mila and his family before heading off for Jaellatra's Skyreach Stone Tablet.

By that point, news that the Skyreach Stone Tablet had opened had already spread across the entire Jaellatra. Since this was a great opportunity for adventure that only presented itself once every few decades, several people were apparently planning to cross the portal as well!

Regardless, on his way over to Jaellatra, Gerald made use of a sound talisman to tell Nori about his plan. Upon hearing that he was heading to the Skyreach Stone Tablet, Nori found herself instantly overjoyed. After all, she was planning to head there herself. With that in mind, she immediately set off to wait for him there.

It was around noon when both of them reunited.

Though it had only been a few days since they had last met, Nori missed Gerald greatly. This was made evident by how she instantly leaped into his arms the second she saw him, not even bothering about the stares from everyone else around them.

Gerald himself was already used to Nori doing this by this point. There was simply no way of stopping the girl from doing this...

Whatever the case was, once she calmed down a bit, Nori looked at him rather curiously as she asked, "How did you even find out that the Skyreach Stone Tablet had opened, Gerald?"

Her curiosity was warranted since people on earth shouldn't have been able to learn of this event. The only feasible answer would be if another person from Jaellatra had told him about it...

Still, Gerald could pretty much be considered as a local to Jaellatra by this point. After all, he had even mastered the art of making secret technique talismans!

Either way, after chuckling in response, Gerald simply smiled faintly before replying, "Let's just say that someone notified me about it!"

At that moment, an almost ethereal hum could be heard as the Skyreach Stone Tablet began shaking, preparing to open...

Shortly after, a swirling halo appeared above it! Slowly, the halo grew larger and larger, and at one point, the light it emitted became so bright that it was almost blinding... By the time

everyone opened their eyes again, the halo had stopped and a large portal had appeared before them...

Seemingly leading into some kind of passageway, everyone watched as a few strangely dressed people walked out from the portal...

These people weren't from earth or Jaellatra. Rather, they came from another world known as the Leicom Continent...

The portal—that only appeared once every few decades—served to connect the Leicom Continent to Jaellatra, and once it appeared, it would remain open for an entire year. Throughout that year, people were free to move between the two worlds, though strangely enough, only those from Jaellatra would enter the Leicom Continent and never the other way around. This had always been the case every time the portal was opened....

Whatever the case was, upon seeing so many people gathered there, one of the people from the Leicom Continent then declared, "Ladies and gentlemen, my name is Miland Knott, and I'm the guardian of the Leicom Continent! While today marks the day the Leicom Continent is connected with Jaellatra again, there are some notable changes this time! For one, not everyone is allowed to enter the Leicom Continent this year! As the new rule states, you'll first need to pass a test in order to qualify for entry!"

Upon hearing that, everyone instantly began discussing the new rule. Wasn't the Leicom Continent being a bit too strict this time around? After all, everyone could enter and leave as they pleased before this! Why was that rule suddenly established?

Either way, after saying that, Miland then waved his large, right hand, prompting another portal to appear beside the one he had exited from.

"This portal leads to a place called the Challenge of the Fairyland, and all of you are only allowed to enter in the form of your divine senses. Upon entry, you won't be able to leave that place till either your divine senses are defeated or you manage to gather five divine stones. Speaking of which, only those who have managed to gather five divine stones will be qualified to enter the Leicom Continent. The stones themselves can only be obtained by defeating the other participants' divine senses! With that said, upon entry, you'll all be given half an hour to prepare yourselves. After that period of time, the portal will be closed and the challenge will officially commence!" explained Miland.

The second his explanation ended, the crowd instantly fell into an uproar! Since everyone was eager to enter the Leicom Continent, they barely gave a second thought as they began turning into their divine sense forms before rushing through the Challenge of the Fairyland portal...

Chapter 1659

"Let's hurry in as well, Gerald! The good spots may get taken by others if we don't get a move on!" exclaimed Nori.

Nodding in agreement, both of them then transformed into their divine sense forms before going through the portal as well.

Upon entering, they were immediately greeted by the sight of a dense forest that felt so refreshing and comfortable that it gave the impression that they really had just entered some fairyland. Even so, Gerald and Nori were well aware that this was actually just an illusory space. Despite that being the case, they also knew that unknown dangers could be lurking in every corner.

While they didn't know how large this illusory space truly was, they had a hunch that the forest

they were currently in wasn't the only terrain here...

And they were right.

Including the forest, there were several other terrains in the Challenge of the Fairyland such as the desert, the ancient city, and the snowfield.

Since the divine senses appeared at random locations—after going through the portals—, the fact that Nori and Gerald had appeared together was truly a sign that they were favored by God.

Regardless, since there was still about fifteen minutes before the challenge began, both Gerald and Nori decided to take a stroll while chatting with each other.

"Since we'll need ten divine stones to both qualify to enter the Leicom Continent, I guess we'll have to defeat ten people!" said Nori while looking at Gerald.

Nodding in response, Gerald then replied, "That's the idea. Still, I find this rule to be slightly surprising... To think that entry into the Leicom Continent would be controlled so strictly!"

"This is honestly the first time this has happened! Before this, just about anyone was allowed to freely traverse between the Leicom Continent and Jaellatra!" explained Nori as she shook her head.

"Well, whatever the case is, I believe that aside from us, several others must have already begun forming groups of their own, even the stronger ones. Then again, Jaellatra already has a great number of strong people!" replied Gerald as he carefully began inspecting his surroundings.

Since Gerald was the only participant from earth, he realized that getting through all this was going to be a good experience for him in general. After all, just as he had said, there were many powerful people in Jaellatra, and they all seemed to have hidden themselves rather well.

Unfortunately for anyone they bumped into, however, Gerald and Nori weren't weak either. In fact, as long as they didn't bump into some crazy strong person who had entered the Seventh-soul rank of the Sage Realm or the Avatar realm, both of them were pretty much good to go.

At that moment, Miland's voice began booming all across the sky.

"Everyone participating! The challenge begins in ten! Nine! Eight..."

As Miland's count got near to zero, Gerald and Nori glanced at each other before simultaneously leaping atop a tall tree before them.

Standing on tree branches, both of them then used the leaves around them to conceal themselves. Unless they were being particularly looked for, it would be incredibly difficult for anyone to even spot them.

Both of them had figured that since they didn't know what dangers were lurking around yet, their best option was to wait patiently for the right moment to strike. It certainly beat the thought of just rashly running around to look for people to defeat.

All in all, there were about a thousand participants in the challenge. In other words, though the illusory space was rather large, the probability of bumping into someone else was still rather high.

"The countdown is over! Let the challenge begin!" announced Miland seconds later.

Following that, the entire area went dead silent. With no voices or even hints of shuffling around, the only sounds that could be heard were the rustling of leaves being blown by the

wind...

However, it wasn't long after before several people got swiftly taken out! Most of those who were disqualified weren't that strong in the first place, and the others just weren't that good at hiding themselves. With that in mind, they had been targeted the second they entered this place, which explained why they had been taken out so quickly and easily.

After a while, Nori couldn't help but mutter, "...Simply hiding here isn't going to do us any good, you know? Allow me to remind you that we're pretty strong too! With that said, we should definitely take the initiative to hunt down the weaker people who are still in the challenge while we can!"

Chapter 1660

Appearing rather distressed as she stared at Gerald, Nori felt the need to remind him that in the end, both of them had already entered the Sage Realm.

Hearing that, Gerald felt that she had a point. With that, he then replied, "...Well, alright then! Let's take the initiative to attack then! The sooner we gather the required divine stones, the sooner we'll be able to complete the challenge!"

With that said, both of them then hopped off the tree together...

However, the second the duo landed, several arrows suddenly shot out at them from within the bushes!

Thankfully, both of them reacted extremely quickly, and they were able to easily dodge the arrows. The arrows themselves ended up piercing a few trees that were behind them...

Following that, three people wielding crossbows rushed out from the bushes, encircling Gerald and Nori in no time!

"To think that we'd bump into prey so soon! What luck, boss!" said a bald man as he smiled sinisterly while looking at the scar-faced man standing beside him.

The trio had earlier been silently moving about when they suddenly saw Gerald and Nori hopping off from that tree. Knowing that this was their chance, all of them had swiftly made their moves without the slightest hesitation.

"Luck you say... In the end, there's still only two of them! How are we going to distribute the divine stones among ourselves?" replied the scar-faced man with a snort as he revealed his own frigid smile.

"I know right? Both of us won't have that problem, however! After all, by the time we're done with you, we'll have three divine stones to share between ourselves!" replied Gerald as he smiled slyly.

Before either of the men could reply, an aurablade suddenly manifested, and just like that, all three of them were taken out in a single swipe!

The second their corpses fell to the ground, their bodies instantly transformed into three separate divine stones...

Picking them up, Gerald kept one for himself before handing the other two to Nori while saying, "Here, take these! They're for you!"

Momentarily shocked silent, Nori—who hadn't expected to be given two divine stones just like that—eventually snapped out of it before quickly replying, "...You were the one who defeated them, Gerald! With that in mind, you should be the one to keep all three of them!"

True to her words, Nori hadn't really done anything, and that led her to believe that she didn't deserve the stones. These were Gerald's spoils!

However, Gerald simply said, "It's fine, I'll just get more later. Just take them!"

Seeing that he wasn't going to take no for an answer, Nori had no choice but to accept the two divine stones. While she didn't explicitly show it, Nori was extremely moved by his generosity.

Gerald himself didn't really think much of it. After all, the trio from earlier was pretty much just sitting ducks waiting to be taken out by either him or Nori.

There was a saying stating 'not accepting offered things was disgraceful', and since those three men were making themselves such easy pickings, Gerald would've certainly been a fool not to take them out while he could.

Regardless, Nori and Gerald then continued moving forward to look for their next prey.

Oddly enough, even after walking around for an entire hour, neither of them bumped into a single person! It was strange, to say the least, and the possibility of everyone else already being defeated didn't sound so farfetched now...

Even so, the challenge had just started... What more, there were at least a thousand participants! The challenge couldn't be over so soon, right...?

A little while later, the duo came across a river. It was only then when they finally decided to take a break from their hunt...

Chapter 1661

Now sitting by the riverside, Nori couldn't help but ask, "...It's strange that we haven't come across any others even after walking around for so long, right...?"

"It truly is... It makes me wonder if we're a little too far off from the others," muttered Gerald—who was also finding the entire experience to be rather perplexing—in response.

The second his sentence ended, a blast of water suddenly shot out from the river... and the duo found themselves staring wide-eyed at the green dragon that had just leaped out of the water!

Now hovering in the air, the dragon glared at Nori and Gerald before releasing a mighty roar that resonated across the area!

Neither of them could have anticipated that such a creature was living in that river!

However, now wasn't the time to ponder about that. After all, the green dragon suddenly began diving toward Gerald and Nori without warning!

"Watch yourself!" shouted Gerald as both he and Nori leaped to the side to avoid the attack!

While they were fortunate enough to dodge the attack, the fact that the area they had been sitting on had completely crumbled proved just how powerful the dragon was. Had they failed to avoid the attack, they would've surely died on the spot...

"Why the hell is there a dragon all of a sudden?! Aren't we supposed to only be fighting against other people?!" asked the shocked Nori.

Based on the current turn of events, Gerald felt that the dragon was just another kind of

magical challenge within this illusory space...

With that in mind, Gerald then shouted, "Go hide first, Nori! I'll deal with the dragon!"

Following that, he summoned Jade Infused Blade and turned it into a sword. After tightening his stance, Gerald then began charging toward the dragon!

For a moment, the dragon almost appeared excited as it began diving toward Gerald as well!

"Slaying Surge of Turmoil!" roared Gerald as his aurablade flared red and flew toward the dragon, piercing right through it!

Roaring in pain, the dragon attempted to struggle for a while... until its eyes eventually turned grey and its massive body came crashing down into the river...

With the dragon now slaughtered, Gerald raised a brow when he saw that two shining items had appeared on the surface of the river.

Heading over to inspect them, the items stopped glowing once he got close enough. The first item was a jade charm whereas the second appeared to be a dragon egg...

After taking the two items for himself, Gerald then returned to Nori.

Now that things had calmed down, both of them began inspecting the two curious items. Neither of them had expected to be rewarded for slaying that dragon, and that only served to prove how magical this illusory space was...

A while later, Gerald slipped the jade charm into his pocket and carefully placed the dragon egg in his backpack.

Both of them had been unable to guess what those two items could be used for, so Gerald made a mental note to study them properly once the challenge was over. Whatever the case was, Gerald was sure that both of the items had to be extremely valuable, either in terms of usage or the fact that they could be hiding secrets within them...

Gerald's train of thought was cut short when he suddenly heard Nori asking, "Come to think of it, what was that move you used earlier? It was super powerful!"

Nori could still remember how amazed she had felt when she saw Gerald's red aurablade earlier...

"Well... Quite frankly, I have no idea either! It just sort of happened!" replied Gerald as he shrugged. He wasn't bluffing when he said that.

After all, the one who had earlier launched the attack was Jade Infused Blade. With that in mind, it explained why Gerald wasn't able to answer Nori's question.

Chapter 1662

Regardless, both of them soon packed up and left the riverside...

It was about ten minutes later when both of them heard the clashes of a fierce battle...

Turning to look at Gerald, Nori then said, "It appears that there's an intense fight happening up front! Let's hurry over and have a look!"

Gerald agreed with Nori's statement. After all, if the fighters were already battered, then there was definitely a chance that both of them could obtain something without any effort. What more, if the fighters were taking on something particularly dangerous, Gerald and Nori could always step in once they were taken out.

With that in mind, both of them then swiftly proceeded forward before masterfully concealing themselves behind a large rock.

Staring ahead at the small forest before them, both of them were greeted by the sight of several black-robed men attacking a youth in white clothes. Since the shoulder areas of his clothes were dyed red, it was only fair to assume that he had been injured there.

Despite his injuries and being severely outnumbered, the youth still fought vigilantly.

Even so, Gerald knew for a fact that the youth was fighting a losing battle. Then again, why were those four people so insistent on taking him down? There had to be a reason for their actions...

"Those four men are clearly bullying that poor youth, Gerald! Let's step in and give him a hand!" grumbled Nori as she glared at the situation with resentful eyes.

Of course, Gerald saw no issue with that. It was a virtue to play the white knight, after all.

Meanwhile, in the forest itself, one of the black-robed men found himself sneering, "Come on Zelig! Stop playing so hard to get and give us your divine stone already!"

"Over my dead body!" scoffed Zelig in response, clearly still having quite a bit of fight left in him.

"If you insist!" roared the man in anger as he gestured for the other three to attack Zelig at the same time!

Seconds before Zelig was hit, a ray of golden light suddenly engulfed Zelig, shocking the other four men enough to momentarily retreat!

Following that, slight rustling could be heard, and the next thing everyone knew, two people were already standing guard before Zelig!

"How villainous for four of you to take on a single person!" scoffed Gerald as he stared at the four people with contemptuous eyes.

Hearing that, all four of them took turns exchanging glances with each other. They hadn't expected to be interfered with halfway through what they were doing.

Shortly after, what seemed to be the leader of the group then glared at Gerald before warning, "Look, buddy. Beat it and leave us to our affairs. Otherwise, don't blame me for killing you too!"

"Hah! I'd like to see you try!" retorted Gerald as his eyes suddenly began glinting murderously.

Before any of the black-robed men were even able to reply, Gerald tossed two secret technique talismans—that he had earlier hidden inside his sleeves—toward the men!

Appearing to burn up just inches away from the talismans' targets, the duo that Gerald had attacked found themselves being engulfed in flames before they were even able to react! And just like that, the two black-robed men had been burned to death...

"...W-what...?!" shouted the two remaining men, momentarily unable to process what had just happened.

Quickly snapping out of it, the shocked leader of that group then shouted, "You... You're a Talisman Master!"

To think that they would actually bump into a Talisman Master here of all places! With that in mind, the two men instantly attempted to bolt off.

'Bold of you to even attempt escape!' Gerald thought to himself. It was evident that they weren't going to be leaving alive!

With that, Gerald then tossed another two secret technique talismans! Upon collision with the escaping duo's bodies, were instantly ensnared by vines that appeared out of nowhere!

Fully bound, the duo flopped to the ground, utterly terrified as they watched Gerald slowly walk toward them.

Staring back at them, Gerald then casually said in a frigid tone, "Well then, thanks for giving us your divine stones!"

With that, Gerald summoned his sword before swiftly ending the remaining two men...

There was no mercy in his attack since Gerald was well aware that not being cruel to his enemies would mean that he was being cruel to himself...

Chapter 1663

Regardless, Gerald then took all four of their divine stones before slipping them into his pocket. Gerald now had five of them.

Either way, he then turned to look at Zelig before asking, "Are you alright?"

Shaking his head, Zelig then replied in a gratuitous voice, "I'm fine, thanks to you saving me! Also, where are my manners! My name is Zelig Lear!"

Upon hearing that, Nori found herself momentarily stunned.

"Wait, you're... Zelig Lear? The second young master of the Lears of Jaellatra?" asked Nori.

Looking at her, Zelig—who clearly hadn't expected her to know who he was—found himself raising a slight brow as he curiously replied, "...I am. And you are...?"

"Ah, I'm Nori from the Zahn family! I didn't think I'd bump into the second young master of the Lear family here! What an honor!" said Nori as she smiled subtly.

The Lears were an extremely strong family in Jaellatra, and many of its members were so strong that some had even managed to enter the Avatar Realm!

Zelig understood how strong his family was as well. With that in mind, to think that he had been caught in the process of failing to defend himself against only four assailants... It was rather embarrassing, to say the least.

Chuckling rather bitterly, Zelig then sighed before replying, "You're exaggerating it, Young Lady Zahn! I'm just a good-for-nothing who's been left behind by the other Lears!"

Though Zelig was the second young master of his family, his training was honestly rather low in comparison. After all, he had only managed to enter the Ninth-rank in the Rune Realm. The fact that he couldn't even breach the Sage Realm had caused his family to collectively label him as being useless. With that in mind, Zelig wasn't exaggerating either when he said that the rest of the Lears had abandoned him.

After staring at Zelig's body for a while Gerald frowned slightly as he said, "...I can sense that due to some odd reasons, you haven't been able to progress past the Ninth-rank of the Rune Realm."

Nodding in response, Zelig then replied, "You're rather insightful, sir! What you said is true and

from what I've managed to gather, there seems to be a strange aura within my body that's keeping my elixir-of-life field sealed. That's the reason why I haven't been able to make any progress at all!"

"I see... Well, it's not like your situation is incurable. You just haven't been using the right methods to properly tackle it!" explained Gerald.

The second he heard that, Zelig was instantly surprised though joy quickly overtook that feeling. The fact that Gerald was able to say that definitely meant that Gerald had a way of helping him!

"...I see! But before that, where are my manners indeed! How should I address you?" asked Zelig.

"You can just call me Gerald. Gerald Crawford!"

"Very well, Mr. Crawford! Getting straight to the point, if you truly have a way to help me, then I'll be willing to offer you my entire life in exchange! I'll be there for you at your every beck and call!" replied Zelig. With how excited he looked, Zelig barely had the temperament of a young master of such a powerful family...

However, that did show how sincere Zelig's words were. Adding that to the fact that Zelig wasn't even close to feeling like a villainous character, Gerald decided that he wasn't against helping him out.

"While I'm fine with helping you, you should focus on gathering five divine stones first. We can talk about this in more detail once we leave this illusory space!" replied Gerald.

After all, though Gerald already possessed five divine stones and Nori had two, Zelig hadn't managed to gather a single stone. With that in mind, they needed eight more stones, which meant that eight more people needed to be defeated...

Chapter 1664

"You're right, Mr. Crawford!" replied Zelig as he instantly began tending to his earlier wounds.

Once he was done, he then set off together with Gerald and Nori.

Thankfully, the subsequent people they bumped into were rather weak, so in no time at all, the trio managed to gather the remaining eight divine stones...

With that done, they quickly rushed back to the exit to get themselves authenticated. Once that was successfully done, they then left the illusory space.

Upon returning to the real world, they were each given a wooden token. The tokens were proof that they had passed the challenge and served as 'passes' of sorts that granted them entry into the Leicom Continent. Naturally, this meant that people who didn't own the wooden tokens wouldn't be allowed access into the other world.

Regardless, since they had been waiting to enter the Leicom Continent for quite a while now, the trio then—rather impatiently—went through the initial portal...

Shielding their eyes from bright rays of white light, they eventually made it into the Leicom Continent without a hitch.

Since this was Gerald's first time here, he was momentarily taken aback by how beautiful this place was. Not only did everything look marveling, but the entire area seemed to be filled with floating continents as well!

Regardless, Gerald found himself snapping out of it when he suddenly heard someone jeering, "Well, well, well! If it isn't Young Master Lear!"

Turning to face the source of the voice, the trio was greeted by the sight of a youth—who had a dark green robe on—walking toward them.

"Lev Bayfield!" scowled Zelig as he frowned.

Lev was the young master of the Bayfield family in Jaellatra, and he had managed to enter the First-soul-rank within the Sage Realm.

"To think that the useless second young master of the Lear family would be able to make it past that challenge! Someone must've helped you, right?" scoffed Lev as he looked at Zelig mockingly before turning to size up Gerald, a glint of interest in his eyes.

It was clear as day that Lev was looking down on Zelig for having to rely on others to fight for him, but before Zelig could even reply, Lev had already turned to leave, laughing mockingly throughout the process.

"...I had previously only heard tales of how sharp Lev's tongue could be. Now that I've witnessed it first-hand, I can safely agree with those rumors!" scowled Nori rather contemptuously as she glared at Lev's back.

From what she had said, it was clear that though she hadn't met Lev before, she had definitely heard of him.

Either way, upon finding a hotel to stay in, the trio quickly realized that the Leicom Continent's currency was rather different from theirs! Since they weren't going to be able to use earth or Jaellatra's currency here, all three of them knew that they had to start thinking of ways to obtain money.

After asking around, they found out that gold coins were the main form of currency here. They also came to realize that there was a famous auction house here that went by the name of the Aurum Auction House. That was definitely going to be their best shot of quickly obtaining this foreign land's currency.

With that, the three people then swiftly headed off for the auction house...

Upon arriving, the trio realized that almost everyone trying to auction things there came from Jaellatra. With that in mind, the crowd was massive, to say the least.

It was quite easy to tell apart who came from Jaellatra and who was a local too due to how different the two cultures looked. If that wasn't already enough, many of the Leicom Continent's residents appeared to resent those from Jaellatra...

Chapter 1665

Regardless, after waiting a short while, Gerald and the other two finally got their chance to reveal their auction item to the appraiser.

Upon revealing the jade charm to him, the trio watched as the appraiser's eyes momentarily widened in shock.

After carefully observing it for a while, the appraiser then said, "...Come with me! All three of you!"

Hearing that, the trio then followed him deeper into the Aurum Auction House...

Once inside, they were soon greeted by the sight of an old man who had a golden crown on his head.

After the appraiser handed the jade charm to the old man, he then whispered something into his ear, prompting the elderly man to appear slightly surprised.

Staring at Gerald for a while, the old man then asked, "How did you obtain the jade charm of the green dragon?"

While slightly hesitant to reveal the information, Gerald eventually replied, "I obtained it after I slaughtered a green dragon that I came across during the Challenge of the Fairyland!"

Upon hearing that, the old man's initial surprise quickly turned into delight.

"To think that you were able to slaughter the green dragon! Just so you know, this jade charm is incredibly valuable since the only way to obtain it is by defeating that dragon! Nobody else has been able to do it but you! How exceedingly powerful you must be!" praised the old man.

Now realizing how valuable the jade charm was, Gerald couldn't help but ask, "How valuable are we talking about here...?"

Booming with laughter in response, the old man then replied, "How do I even say this... I can say for sure that even if you auction it for a few million gold coins, you'd still find a buyer! That's how valuable it is! Now that you know how much it's worth, please tell me whether you'd still like to auction it!"

Hearing that the jade charm was worth that much, Gerald and the other two instantly found themselves getting excited. After thinking about it for a little longer, Gerald finally declared, "Very well! I'm agreeing to have it auctioned!"

In the end, no matter how valuable the jade charm was, money was still the priority since without any, they wouldn't be able to survive long in the Leicom Continent.

"I'm glad to hear that! However, do note that the Aurum Auction House will get a share of thirty percent off the final auctioned price. Do you accept?" asked the crowned old man.

Turning to look at Nori and Zelig, they didn't appear to object to the idea. With that, Gerald then nodded in agreement.

"Very well, then! Please come with me to the waiting area! We'll be auctioning the jade charm of the green dragon very soon!" said the auctioneer as he led the trio to an area where the other sellers were. With how the area was positioned, the sellers were given a clear view of their items getting auctioned.

Whatever the case was, upon arriving, Gerald and the two others sat side by side as they waited for the auction to begin.

It was only a few minutes later when they saw the crowned old man walk up the stage. The auction was finally beginning!

Clearing his throat, the elderly man then declared "Ladies and gentlemen! We have a wonderful array of valuable auction items today as well! Without further ado, here comes the first item, the Phoenix Fan!"

Following that, the old man then pulled the red cloth off the first auction item, revealing a golden fan! Since the feathers on the fan were supposedly phoenix feathers, the item was definitely an exquisite one.

Chapter 1666

"We'll begin the bid at a hundred thousand gold coins! As a reminder, each bid's increment has to exceed fifty thousand gold coins!" explained the crowned old man.

Now that the bidding process had officially begun, the crowd instantly went into an uproar!

"Two hundred thousand gold coins!" shouted a wealthy-looking man. Since he had increased the bid by a hundred thousand gold coins right off the bat, it was only fair to assume that he was filthy rich.

However, right after that, a fat man—who was sitting opposite of the previous bidder—stood up before shouting, "Three hundred thousand gold coins!"

Truth be told, Gerald and the other two felt that the old hand fan wasn't really worth that much. Even so, who were they to judge? These people were filthy rich, so they could do anything they wanted with their money.

Eventually, the hand fan was sold—to the businessman from before who had started the bid—for a whopping six hundred thousand gold coins!

Following that, it took about two more hours for the next two items to be auctioned off.

Since Gerald's jade charm of the green dragon was the fourth and last item to be auctioned for the day, the trio had to patiently wait throughout the bidding process.

Now that the second-last item had been auctioned off, all three of them instantly began focusing on the auction again as the crowned old man removed the red cloth covering Gerald's jade charm...

Clearing his throat, the old man then declared, "For our last item for today, we have the jade charm of the green dragon! I'm sure I don't need to elaborate on how rare this treasure is! With that said, the bid starts with three million gold coins, and any further increment must exceed a million gold coins! Without further ado, let the bidding begin!"

The second his sentence ended, someone immediately shouted, "Five million gold coins!"

"Give it up! I'm paying six million gold coins!"

"Seven million gold coins! It's mine!"

With how rapidly the bidders were increasing the final price of the jade charm, it wasn't long before the bid amount went over ten million gold coins... Even then, the price just kept on rising!

Eventually, the final bid amounted to a whopping twenty million gold coins! By that point, the crowd had quieted down, and nobody dared to further increase the already outrageous bid amount. After all, twenty million gold coins was already far beyond what anyone could have anticipated the final price to be.

With that in mind, the crowned old man then hammered on the podium before looking at the final bidder—a young man wearing a royal-looking outfit who was seated at the front-most row—and declaring, "Prince Severin has bid twenty million gold coins! Even if anyone else wishes to compete against that, I've decided that Prince Severin will be the rightful owner of the jade charm! With that said, congratulations, Prince Severin! The jade charm of the green dragon is now yours!"

Since Prince Severin was the prince of the Leicom Continent's royal family, that amount was

nothing much to him.

To the trio, however, it was as though they had hit the jackpot.

Nori herself was so excited that she couldn't hold herself back from exclaiming, "By god! Twenty million gold coins! You're definitely made a fortune this time, Gerald!"

Gerald himself hadn't expected the jade charm to fetch such a high price. If the jade charm of the green dragon alone could be sold for this much, then the dragon egg would surely sell for billions, right...?

Despite the thought, Gerald didn't really want others to know that he had the egg yet. Besides, it wasn't as though he was poor in these foreign lands anymore.

Regardless, soon after the auction ended, the trio watched as the crowned old man ordered his men to carry three huge chests filled with gold coins over...

Though he was extremely wealthy on earth, Gerald himself had never seen so many gold coins at once! Due to that, all three of them found themselves momentarily shocked by what they saw...

Chapter 1667

Eventually snapping out of it, Nori then turned to look at Gerald before asking, "...That's... quite a lot. How on earth are we going to carry all this around, Gerald...?"

Though it was true that there were three chests and the trio could technically carry one each, it was going to be far too much of a hassle in the long term. What more, once people saw all that gold, they would surely be tempted to rob them...

Realizing that Gerald was stressed over how to bring all that money around, the crowned old man then handed a small ring to him.

Slightly startled to suddenly be given a ring, Gerald couldn't help but ask, "...I'm sorry, but what's this ring about...?"

"It's a storage ring with a particularly huge storage space! You can keep your gold in that so you won't have to fret about carrying it about!" explained the old man with an amiable smile.

"That... I can't just accept something like this for free! How about this? I'll buy this ring off you for a million gold coins! Is that acceptable?" asked Gerald who simply wasn't the kind of person to willingly take a free meal for nothing.

Seeing how sensible Gerald was, the old man chose not to refuse. And just like that, the money was traded for the ring.

After slipping the ring on, Gerald gently tapped it, prompting a pocket space to suddenly appear before him!

Upon seeing how spacious it was inside, Gerald quickly placed the remaining money within that space, making sure to put his backpack inside as well.

With how convenient the storage ring was, Gerald couldn't help but consider it to be a treasure.

Regardless, now that that issue had been solved, Gerald was just about to leave with Nori and Zelig when the old man suddenly called out, "Please wait for a moment! There's someone who wishes to meet you!"

Hearing that, the trio was instantly puzzled. After all, they had just arrived at the Leicom

Continent. Who on earth could be wanting to meet them?

Now that he had their attention, the old man then led them to a guest hall at the back.

Upon arriving, they were surprised to see that the one who had wanted to meet up with them was none other than Prince Severin!

Being the buyer of the jade charm of the green dragon, Prince Severin had been keen on meeting the person who had even considered selling the precious treasure in the first place.

Either way, now that they were here, the old man bowed respectfully before the prince before saying, "Lady and gents, this young man goes by the name of Prince Severin, and he comes from the royal family of the Leicom Continent! He's also the one who bought the jade charm of the green dragon!"

Hearing that, Gerald couldn't help but stare at the prince for a while. Though he didn't really know how to greet a prince, Gerald was at least sure that he had to be respectful.

With that in mind, Gerald then greeted, "It's an honor to meet you, Prince Severin!"

Staring back at Gerald with a curious gaze, the prince then replied, "...You're the one who sold the jade charm, correct?"

Chapter 1668

Nodding in response, Gerald then replied, "That's right. My companions and I came from Jaellatra, you see, and since we had no money, I decided to sell the jade charm!"

"...You... Do you not know how precious the jade charm of the green dragon is...?" muttered the confused Prince Severin.

Gerald, for one, honestly had no clue.

Truth be told, was he not in dire need of money, he wouldn't have sold off the jade charm. After all, he hadn't even studied it yet. Even so, Prince Severin's tone alone was enough to tell Gerald how extraordinary a treasure the jade charm actually was...

Now getting increasingly curious, Gerald shook his head before asking, "I'm afraid I'm clueless, Prince Severin. Do enlighten me!"

"...Very well! You see, the jade charm you sold me is the symbol of the green dragon, and the person who owns it will be granted the powers of the green dragon! In case you didn't know, among the four Divine Beasts, the green dragon is the strongest among them!" explained Severin.

Upon hearing that, the trio instantly found themselves surprised. To think that the jade pendant was this useful! Now that he knew what the jade pendant was capable of, Gerald began slightly regretting his choice of selling it...

Even so, what was done, was done. He couldn't just take it back now that it had officially been sold. What more, the buyer of the jade pendant was the prince of this continent! With that in mind, getting it back was only going to be even more difficult!

Understanding that it was best if he just gave up on reobtaining it, Gerald then said in a slightly resigned tone, "...I see. I appreciate you telling me more about it, Prince Severin... Regardless, the jade pendant is now yours, so you don't need to worry about me trying to reclaim it!"

Staring into Gerald's eyes, the prince could sense that Gerald wasn't lying to him. With that, he

then replied, "...Well said. I trust in you!"

Following that, the two parties talked for a while longer before going their separate ways...

As they left the Aurum Auction House, Gerald kept reminding himself that it was no use crying over spilled milk. The fact that they now owned a fortune definitely helped Gerald convince himself that this outcome wasn't all that bad. After all, it was better than having nothing at all.

By rough estimation, all that money was more than enough for all three of them to live for an entire year in the Leicom Continent worry-free.

With that in mind, the trio made sure to not only find a better place to stay in, but to also celebrate by having a hearty dinner together...

Fast forward to night time, Gerald ended up having to share a room with Nori while Zelig slept in another room.

While Gerald was naturally reluctant to have to share a room with her, Nori kept insisting that she stayed with him with the excuse that she was afraid of being alone. With how things currently were, it was obvious that Nori won in the end.

Whatever the case was, now that they were in a private room, Gerald finally took the chance to take the green dragon's egg out from his backpack.

Carefully placing it on the table, Gerald then began observing the egg, wondering if another green dragon would actually hatch from it.

Walking over to Gerald's side, Nori then sat beside him. Looking at the egg with her own curious gaze, she then found herself asking, "...Do you think another green dragon will hatch from this...?"

"It's possible. Even if that's the case, we don't really know when it's going to hatch anyway," replied Gerald rather calmly.

The second his sentence ended, however, a crisp crack could be heard from the egg...

Staring wide-eyed as small cracks began racing down the dragon egg, Gerald and Nori were momentarily left speechless when a green dragon eventually peeked out from within the now cracked egg!

With eyes that were the size of Gerald's thumbs, the baby dragon simply stared back at Gerald and Nori until Nori eventually snapped out of it.

With how cute it was, Nori was immediately captivated and she found herself squealing, "It's... It's an adorable baby green dragon!"

Chapter 1669

Just as she was about to touch it, however, the baby dragon instantly responded with a tiny roar! Though the small dragon was even bearing its two tiny fangs, its actions only made Nori's heart melt even further.

"Oh...? Are you being mean to me even though I'm treating you so kindly, little fella?" scowled Nori in a playful tone.

Seemingly understanding that it was being scolded, the baby dragon quickly curled up into a ball...

Seeing that, Gerald couldn't help but smile.

Reaching out his arm, Gerald then lifted the baby dragon before placing it in his palm... Contrary to its initial reaction toward Nori, the dragon appeared to trust Gerald completely, and this was made evident by how much it kept rubbing its cheek against his palm.

Seeing how comfortable the dragon was around Gerald, Nori added in a cheerful tone, "It seems that the little fella trusts you a lot! It didn't even attempt to be mean to you when you first touched it!"

The truth was, the baby was only behaving this way since it was familiar with Gerald's scent. After all, he had been carrying the egg around this entire time. With that in mind, it was only natural that the dragon trusted Gerald the most.

Regardless, the two then proceeded to play around with the baby dragon late into the night...

By that point, the baby dragon had already familiarized itself with Nori, so it no longer saw her as an enemy. To Nori's delight, it was even willing to let her hold him!

Eventually, the three then headed to bed...

When morning came, Gerald and Nori were abruptly awoken by the baby dragon's hisses!

Seeing that it kept hissing while hopping atop their bodies, Nori quickly realized what was up, prompting her to say, "...I think it's hungry, Gerald!"

While they now had one mystery solved, another one was instantly posed. What should they feed it? For all they knew, dragons probably had different diets compared to humans...

Unsure where to even begin, Gerald then placed the dragon into the storage ring before leaving the hotel with Nori and Zelig in search of food...

Eventually, they managed to find a restaurant and they made sure to order all sorts of delicious-smelling foods.

Once the food arrived, Gerald slipped some meat into the storage ring, hoping that the dragon would like it.

To his dismay, all it did was lay on its stomach! It barely had any interest in the food Gerald had provided!

"It doesn't eat meat...? Then what does it eat?" mumbled the perplexed Gerald.

Whatever the case was, Gerald eventually decided that it was best if the trio fed themselves first before worrying about the baby dragon.

After their meal was over, the trio then continued walking around, hoping that they would somehow come across something that the baby green dragon was willing to eat.

As they were passing by a magnificent-looking manor, the baby dragon suddenly appeared to grow excited within the storage ring! Finding its reaction to be odd, Gerald then released it from the pocket space to see what was up.

The second it was freed, however, the dragon bolted right into the manor, appearing to be drawn by something inside!

Unable to react fast enough to recapture it, Gerald then called out, "Hey, come back!"

Leaping over the manor's fence, the trio then quickly began chasing after the dragon...

By the time they caught up to it, the baby dragon was already munching on something

underneath a tree...

Seeing bits of food all around it, Nori raised a slight brow as she curiously asked, "What is it even eating...?"

All three of them were equally curious since the dragon appeared to be eating so contently even though it barely had any interest in the meat that Gerald fed it earlier.

Squatting beside the dragon, Gerald took a closer look at the bits of food before saying, "...It seems to be eating some kind of fruit... Since it likes it so much, it's only fair to assume that whatever it's eating is the king of fruits!"

Chapter 1670

With that deduced, all three of them found themselves looking upward... and to their amazement, they saw countless fruits emitting dazzling pink glows growing on the tree!

"My god! Those fruits look so beautiful and juicy! What kind of fruit even is that?" exclaimed Nori in her awe.

By no means was she exaggerating when she described how stunning the fruits looked. From the looks of it, the fruit was native only to the Leicom Continent...

Upon picking one of the fruits, Gerald could instantly feel a strange energy being emitted from it. How mysterious...

Barely a second later, the trio snapped out of their awe when two women—each wearing long white robes—with white wings growing on their backs suddenly descended from the sky!

"Who are you people? How dare you barge in here and steal our holy fruit!" shouted one of the women as she pointed angrily at Gerald.

"These women are strong, brother Gerald!" warned Zelig upon seeing how strange the two women were. From what he could tell, they had at least entered the Fourth-soul-rank in the Sage Realm!

"Um... Sorry, but we didn't mean to barge in intentionally!" explained Gerald, trying to deescalate the situation.

"Quit your cr*p! You're saying that even when you have a fruit in your hand?! I'm teaching you thieves a good lesson if it's the last thing I do!" scowled the other curvier woman.

The second her sentence ended, both of them then charged toward Gerald and his friends!

"I'll take care of them! You two leave first!" ordered Gerald.

Not about to say no to that, Nori and Zelig then bounded away while Gerald summoned his blade to take on the two women.

Though the duo had entered the Fourth-soul-rank in the Sage Realm, they were still unable to take on Gerald!

As the duo was sent flying back by a shockwave from Gerald's aurablade, they couldn't help but look at each other, feeling slightly taken aback. Neither of them had anticipated for Gerald to have such terrifying power... They weren't even his match even when working together! They had truly bumped into a tough opponent this time...

Before the two parties could clash again, a stream of light suddenly blasted right between them, prompting the trio to back away!

Once the blinding light faded, Gerald saw that the one who had stepped in was a crowned woman donning a robe with phoenix-like patterns...

"Stop it, all of you!" ordered the crowned woman in a calm voice.

"Lord Mage!" shouted both of the women in respectful tones as they quickly took a few steps back before kneeling before her.

Seeing that, Gerald didn't feel the need to continue fighting either.

Whatever the case was, the crowned woman then replied, "Both of you can leave now. I'll

handle the rest. ”

Upon hearing that, the duo then got up and left.

Now that they were gone, the crowned woman then turned to look at Gerald before asking, “This young green dragon... Is it yours?”

Hearing that, Gerald turned to look at the dragon—who was already savoring another fruit—before looking back at the crowned woman and saying, “It is, and to be quite frank, I have no idea why it’s so interested in that fruit!”

Chapter 1671

“Well, for one, this particular fruit is a holy fruit known as Heaven’s apple!” explained the crowned woman.

As she went on, Gerald came to learn that the Heaven’s apple only matured once every hundred years. Since the fruit was capable of replenishing energy and mending wounds, it was a fundamental pharmaceutical ingredient in the Leicom Continent.

“...Alright, but... That doesn’t explain why the dragon’s so interested in the Heaven’s apples. Just so you know, I even fed it meat earlier, but it barely showed any interest!” replied the confused Gerald.

Chuckling in response, the crowned woman then said, “Since that’s the case, I’m now surer than ever that the green dragon is one of the Divine Beasts of the Leicom Continent. I’m assuming you found it while taking on the Challenge of the Fairyland? Regardless, just know that the dragon will only feed on Heaven’s apples!”

Seeing that Gerald registered her words, the crowned woman then cleared her throat before adding in a more serious tone, “Either way, since the young green dragon chose you to be its master, I’m sure you’re no ordinary person. With that said, I hope you’ll nurture it well! If you do, I’m sure it’ll help you obtain unimaginable gains!”

Hearing that, Gerald simply nodded. Even without the idea of getting anything back in return, he was still going to take good care of the baby dragon.

Pleased by Gerald’s determination, the woman then waved her hand... prompting hundreds of Heaven’s apples to be plucked before they quickly gathered in front of Gerald!

Momentarily dumbfounded, Gerald eventually snapped out of it before asking, “...What’s all this then?”

“Well, let’s just say that I believe we were fated to meet! Since the young dragon needs the Heaven’s apples anyway, consider these to be my gift to you!” replied the crowned woman with a smile.

Before Gerald could even reply, the crowned woman had already leaped into the sky, and soon after, she couldn’t even be seen anymore...

Unsure how to even respond to the turn of events, Gerald simply placed all the Heaven’s apples into his storage ring...

Following that, Gerald then began walking out of the manor with the baby dragon. Since it was already full, the happy dragon soon began snoring within the storage ring...

Sighing helplessly, Gerald then muttered, “Hey now... To think that you’re sleeping right after I cleaned up the mess you made... It makes me wonder if I’m really your master here!”

Still, the dragon was now his pet, so Gerald was well aware that it was his duty to take good

care of it.

Eventually, Gerald reunited with Nori and Zelig who had been waiting at the manor's gate this entire time.

Seeing that he was in one piece, both of them instantly sighed in relief. That made it quite evident that they had been worried about his safety this entire time.

Even so, that didn't stop Nori from looking around Gerald—almost as though she was trying to see if he had suffered any injuries—as she asked, “Are you alright Gerald? Are you hurt anywhere?”

Shaking his head, Gerald then replied, “I'm perfectly fine. I was able to clear the misunderstanding!”

Hearing that, the duo was relieved once again. After all, they would surely be greatly saddened if something bad happened to him.

Regardless, now that the food problem had been solved, Gerald then looked at the duo before asking, “Speaking of which... Do you two have a reason for coming here?”

Quite frankly, he had no idea why he was here in the first place.

“...Huh? You're telling us you don't know why we're here...?” replied Zelig in surprise.

“Not a clue. I'm assuming you know the reason...?” asked Gerald with a slight frown as Zelig and Nori exchanged glances with each other before nodding.

Chapter 1672

“We're here to enroll in the Leicom Academy to train and become stronger cultivators!” replied Nori.

“The Leicom Academy...?” asked Gerald, feeling confused.

Following that, Nori and Zelig then began detailing the academy to Gerald.

Essentially, the Leicom Academy was the largest academy for cultivators in the Leicom Continent. Once every decade, the academy would select talents from different continents to enroll there, and those who were chosen usually ended up becoming the most powerful of cultivators. The academy also had a system where the student with the most outstanding performance would be appointed as chief scholar. Needless to say, obtaining that title was a great honor within that academy...

Regardless, that was pretty much the reason why all those people from Jaellatra had come over. Gerald himself wasn't aware of all this since only those from Jaellatra even knew about the Leicom Continent.

Whatever the case was, now that Gerald understood what was happening, he was prompted to ask, “And... How exactly can we enroll in the academy?”

After hearing how prestigious it was, Gerald was now fired up to get into the academy and have a look at how great it was himself. Who knows, he could encounter an experience of a lifetime if he managed to enroll there...

“Well, we first need to pass a test!” replied Zelig.

"I see... When's it going to be held?" asked Gerald.

"Around three this evening."

Raising a slight brow, Gerald then checked the time...

...It was already half-past two. The test was in half an hour!

"...It's already two-thirty! If we don't hurry, we're going to be late!" exclaimed Gerald, prompting the duo to look at each other before nodding.

Thankfully, the trio was able to arrive at the academy in time...

By three, the Leicom Academy's front gates were already flooded with at least a thousand people. Though many among them were from Jaellatra and had already undergone the initial selection process in the Challenge of the Fairyland, they were still keen on joining the academy.

Even so, just like all the previous times, only eight hundred people would be recruited in the end. With that in mind, it was no exaggeration that the competition just to get enrolled was extremely fierce.

Looking at the crowd, Nori couldn't help but exclaim, "There are so many people this year!"

Seconds later, the crisp sound of a bell being rung could be heard from within the academy...

Following that, four figures suddenly appeared before the academy's gates!

They were the four main guards of the Leicom Academy—who had each already entered the Avatar Realm—, and their main task was to keep the academy safe. With that in mind, it was clear as day that these four were extremely terrifying individuals.

In fact, all four of their auras combined were so pressuring that everyone instantly fell into silence upon their arrival.

Naturally, Gerald and his friends weren't excluded from this feeling. Even though Gerald's mind was well-trained, having to face such strong cultivators who had entered the Avatar Realm was still proving to be a little too taxing for him. Gerald's strength was near-incomparable to the four guards...

Understanding that, Gerald could guess that there had to be many more strong cultivators within the academy. It seemed that Nori and Zelig really weren't exaggerating earlier when they sang praises about the largest academy within the Leicom Continent...

Chapter 1673

Following that, everyone watched a man wearing a blue robe descended from the sky...

Steadily landing before the crowd, his presence somehow made everyone go even quieter than before.

"...Welcome. I go by Karsten Ykink, and I'm the exam proctor of the Leicom Academy. With that said, I'll be the chief examiner of your tests today. If any of you weren't already aware, you'll only be able to enroll if you pass our test!" explained Karston.

With that said, Karsten then waved his hand, prompting a massive gust of wind to begin blowing... The next thing everyone knew, two huge platforms had manifested before them!

"Let's not beat around the bush, shall we? The gents are to queue for the left platform while the ladies the right. Essentially, you'll all be going against representatives of the Leicom Academy, and in order to pass the test, all candidates will have to withstand attacks from them! For those who manage to withstand three consecutive strikes, you'll be allowed to enter the elite class! If you manage to take two, you'll be given access to the intermediate class! Finally, those who are only able to withstand a single hit will be allowed to enter the beginner class. If you can't even take the first hit, then don't even dream of getting past the gates!" added Karsten.

Gerald found that the selection process was pretty simple and efficient. If he was going to be completely honest, he now felt that passing the test was going to be a breeze.

"Confident, brother Gerald?" asked Zelig.

"Of course! What about you, brother Zelig?" replied Gerald with a smile.

"Same here. Which class are you aiming for?"

"The elite one of course!" declared Gerald.

Since he was already taking the time and effort to enroll, it felt only natural to Gerald to want to be in the best class. To him, entering any other class was pretty much meaningless.

Upon hearing that, Zelig simply nodded. With how confident Gerald sounded, Zelig truly wanted to believe that Gerald was capable enough to achieve his goal...

Shortly after, both of them heard Nori say, "Well, I'll be heading over to the other platform first. We'll regroup later!"

Recalling that the participants were separated and tested by gender, Gerald then smiled as he replied, "Alright! Go on ahead!"

With their momentary goodbyes said, the trio then began lining up accordingly...

Compared to Nori's side, Gerald's line was exceedingly long. After all, there were definitely a lot more men trying to get enrolled compared to women.

By listening in on the others' conversations, Gerald was able to find out that many of the present candidates had previously failed and were here to attempt their luck in getting enrolled again.

It was sometime later when an angry voice could suddenly be heard shouting, "Get lost!"

Turning around, Gerald watched as a man in a blue brocade outfit began walking to the front with two other men following behind him. As the man in blue continued walking forward, his two lackeys made sure to shove anyone too close to him away.

The man himself would scowl or even straight up beat up anyone who stood in his path. With that in mind, nobody dared to get into his bad books.

Watching all this take place, Gerald couldn't help but frown. After all, he hated people like these the most.

Just as Gerald was thinking that, a chubby young man—who wasn't all that far from Gerald—got pushed to the ground by one of the lackeys.

"Stop blocking the road, fatso!" scowled the man in blue brocade as he glared at the young

man.

Upon hearing that, the chubby man instantly got to his feet before lowering his head and standing aside.

Watching as the chubby man dusted himself, the man in blue couldn't help but get slightly excited now that he knew how wimpy the chubby man was.

Unable to hold back, the man in blue then scoffed, "You know what? For blocking my way in the first place, I'm teaching you a lesson if it's the last thing I do! Men, beat him up!"

"Right away!" shouted both of his men as they prepared to punch the innocent chubby man!

However, before they could even land their hits, a figure suddenly appeared right before the chubby youth...

Chapter 1674

Unable to even react in time, the two men watched as the figure launched two consecutive lightning-fast kicks! The next thing they knew, they were already flying in the air!

Upon seeing that, the man in blue was instantly shocked. It hadn't occurred to him that someone would actually dare to beat his men up!

"Three against one? How shameless!" scoffed Gerald who was obviously the one who had taken action.

"...You... Who are you? And how dare you get involved in this! You must have a death wish or something!" retorted the man in blue as he glared at Gerald.

Of course, Gerald wasn't afraid of them in the least.

"Who, me? I'm just a passer-by who can't stand scummy people like you!" replied Gerald in a casual tone.

"You...! Look kid, if you didn't already know, my name is Yan Zanetti! The eldest young master of the Zanetti family from Jaellatra's Jouen State! Now kneel before me and apologize! If you don't, well... Let's just say that you'll soon be in for a world of suffering!" growled Yan.

"Like I care who you are. We're all equals in my eyes! With that said, who are you to bully others?" scoffed Gerald as he looked at Yan with disdainful eyes.

"So you crave death that much, huh?! Fine then! You only have yourself to blame for offending me so much!" roared Yan as he instantly launched a fist at Gerald!

From the looks of his attacking stance, Yan was most probably a cultivator who had a rather good grasp of martial arts. Unfortunately for him, his strength was nowhere near Gerald's immense power...

With that in mind, all it took was a single kick from Gerald to launch Yan into the sky! With how swift Gerald's movements were, Yan wasn't even able to react in time, let alone land his hit!

Shouting in pain as he fell to the ground, it was evident that the fall hurt quite a bit.

Whatever the case was, everyone who had watched all that play out couldn't help but gawk at Gerald. To think that he was this fast and strong!

"You... You dare attack me?! I'm not letting you off if it's the last thing I do!" roared Yan, attempting to act tough.

Hearing that, Gerald was about to continue beating Yan up when he felt someone tug on his arm. Looking back, Gerald saw that the person was a handsome young man...

Smiling as he looked at Gerald, the young man then said, "You're a really good fighter, brother! With that said, let's not bother about someone like him!"

"...And you are?" asked Gerald with a slightly raised brow.

"Ah, where are my manners! My name is Cyril Gabrio, and I'm from Jaellatra's Arbreux Prefecture!"

The second everyone heard that, they were once again flabbergasted out of their minds!

"The Arbreux Prefecture?! Holy cow!"

"I know right?! To think that he's the eldest young master of the Gabrio family!"

"That's what surprises you? I'm more shocked to know that he's here to enroll in the first place!"

"Now that you mention it, yeah! How utterly unbelievable!"

As the others continued talking about Cyril, Yan couldn't help but widen his eyes in shock. After all, Yan was well aware that compared to Cyril, he was nothing...

Chapter 1675

"...I see. Gerald Crawford!" replied Gerald as he politely introduced himself.

Nodding in response, Cyril then praised, "Noted, brother Gerald! Still, you were amazing just now!"

"It was nothing, I was simply trying to help the bullied," replied Gerald calmly. After flashing a subtle smile at Cyril, Gerald then turned back to look at Yan... only to realize that he had already snuck off!

Well, it wasn't as though he was all that interested in Yan in the first place. After all, there were many others in the world just like Yan, and Gerald couldn't be bothered to teach each and every one of them a lesson.

His train of thought was cut short when he heard Cyril ask, "Brother Gerald, I wonder if you'd be interested in becoming my friend...?"

Seeing no reason not to be, Gerald simply nodded in agreement.

Whatever the case was, the selection process soon officially began. Since they weren't in any particular rush, Gerald, Zelig, and Cyril simply took the chance to watch the other participants first.

Standing near the platform, Gerald kept a close eye on the academy's representatives. It was always good to know your opponents first before battle, and this was Gerald's chance to properly analyze their abilities and think of ways to counter them. Truth be told, Gerald wasn't

planning on only withstanding the three strikes, oh no. Instead, he wanted to completely defeat his opponent. After all, this was what a strong man should do. Simply having to withstand three strikes was a little too belittling for Gerald's tastes.

Either way, Gerald began paying attention to the platform again when a man donning blue robes walked up the platform. With a folding fan in his hand, the man appeared rather confident.

However, Gerald had to actively hold back from laughing when he saw that man.

'Who even is this guy? Can just about anyone participate in the selection process? What an eyesore!' Gerald thought to himself.

With the sounding of a gong, the first round of testing officially began!

Understanding that the testing process had begun, the man bolted toward the academy's representative, waving his folding fan before him the entire time!

However, it was barely a second later when the man was kicked off the platform! He never stood a chance!

Not even bothering to look at the man, Karsten then announced, "Fail! Next!"

Seeing that, everyone who had witnessed what had just happened instantly began discussing the situation. Nobody had anticipated the academy's representative to be this strong...!

Despite everyone's worries, Gerald was as cool as a cucumber. After all, he already knew that the man in blue was weak before he was even defeated, so the result didn't really shock him all that much. That man simply never stood a chance in the first place...

Following that, many other candidates got up the platform as well. However, just like the first man, many of them ended up getting tossed off the platform in a single strike.

Eventually, Karsten—who had been relaxing on a chair—couldn't help but shake his head. What a disappointing selection...

"Next!" shouted Karsten, now growing considerably impatient.

"Why don't you go next, Brother Gerald!" suggested Zelig.

"Sure, why not?" replied Gerald as he nodded before raising his hand.

Upon seeing how thin Gerald was, many of the participants couldn't help but think that Gerald would surely get defeated in a single hit.

Walking up the platform and standing before his opponent, Gerald was now in full view of everyone...

Chapter 1676

"You know, you look just like all the previous others who've failed. With that said, why don't you just toss in the towel already! In doing so, you'll at least be able to leave with all your bones intact!" mocked the academy's representative.

'You're looking down on me already?' Gerald thought to himself with a frown. After hearing that, there was no way he was letting his opponent off easily.

“So, you’re talking big before the fight has even begun? Let’s just hope that you won’t end up being the one tossed out the platform instead!” retorted Gerald in a confident tone.

“Talk is cheap, kid! Regardless, you seem to be itching to die! With that in mind, I won’t be going easy on you! State your name!” scowled the representative as he glared at Gerald.

“The name’s Gerald Crawford! And what’s yours? Hopefully I won’t forget who you are if we ever meet again in the academy!” replied Gerald.

“How ballsy! Alright, listen up! My name’s Ferdinand Gagne, and I’m the class monitor of the fifth elite class!” roared Ferdinand.

Following that, the gong was rung and the test commenced!

Watching as Ferdinand charged toward him, Gerald could sense that he had at least entered the Third-soul-rank of the Sage Realm. Though his speed would’ve been impressive to normal people, Gerald honestly found that Ferdinand was still quite weak compared to him.

With that in mind, Gerald knew that he didn’t even need to come close to using his full power. At most, he only required the strength of a Second-soul-rank master in the Sage Realm to take Ferdinand down.

Regardless, as Ferdinand’s fist came inches away from Gerald, everyone could already imagine Gerald getting flung off the platform...

Of course, that wasn’t about to happen.

Staring wide-eyed, everyone could hardly believe it when Gerald successfully dodged Ferdinand’s first attack!

“...Huh? Did... Did he just dodge that attack?!” shouted several people who were watching.

Upon hearing that comment, Ferdinand instantly got simultaneously annoyed and embarrassed. How humiliating to not be able to take Gerald out in a single strike! No matter, he just had to finish him off with another one!

With that, Ferdinand quickly began running toward Gerald again, this time aiming to kick him! With how deadly his attack looked, it was quite obvious that he was trying to finish Gerald off for good!

However, Ferdinand was truly underestimating Gerald’s capabilities. With barely any effort, Gerald managed to dodge Ferdinand’s second attack as well!

“That’s the second move!” cheered several people from the crowd.

By that point, Karsten—who was still seated there—turned to look at Gerald in surprise. After all, he hadn’t expected Gerald—of all people—to be able to withstand two strikes from Ferdinand!

Smiling rather smugly now, Gerald then sneered, “Come on, you have one final go! Let’s see if you can finally land a hit!”

Naturally, Ferdinand exploded in rage after hearing those humiliating words! However, he was no idiot. After missing two of his attacks, he was well aware that he wasn’t a match for Gerald.

Despite knowing that, his ego was much higher than his intelligence. He couldn’t just admit defeat like this! With that in mind, Ferdinand decided to use his full strength against Gerald!

Now laughing almost maniacally, Ferdinand’s expression darkened as he confidently scoffed, “Oh, don’t you worry! I’m definitely ending you with this move!”

Though he was being threatened, Gerald barely even flinched. After all, he now knew that Ferdinand was all talk. The fool was probably thinking that mere power was sufficient to take Gerald down!

Chapter 1677

Regardless, Ferdinand then stomped his foot so hard onto the platform that it left a circular dent within it! Following that, he used all that force to leap into the air like some ferocious tiger!

Despite facing that feral man, Gerald remained as cool as a cucumber as he slowly lifted his leg... before swinging it right into Ferdinand's stomach!

Instantly sent flying backward, Ferdinand landed quite a distance away with a loud 'thud'!

Upon witnessing that, everyone was momentarily stupefied. When they recovered, however, they quickly began murmuring among themselves in admiration.

"By god! That person's so powerful that he was actually able to defeat Ferdinand!"

Naturally, Gerald's victory instantly made him the most prominent person there.

Even Karsten was amazed by the turn of events. To think that Gerald would actually be able to take down someone who had entered the Second-soul-rank of the Sage Realm so easily!

Getting to his feet, Karsten then walked over to Gerald before saying, "Congratulations for passing the test! Due to your perfect performance, you'll be given access to the elite class of Leicom Academy!"

Hearing that, Gerald then nodded as he replied, "Thank you, Master Ykink!"

With that, the youth then got off the platform as everyone stared jealously at him... Though many envied him for all the attention he was getting, they knew for a fact that they would never even come close to being as strong as Gerald. After all, he had actually managed to take down Ferdinand!

Speaking of Ferdinand, though the testing period resumed immediately after, he was in no shape of testing any other candidates. After all, Gerald's kick had caused him to suffer a number of internal injuries.

Forced to recuperate, the furious Ferdinand vowed that he wouldn't let Gerald off that easily!

Regardless, the testing finally ended after an entire day...

By the end of it, Zelig was assigned to the beginner class while Cyril and Nori managed to make it into the intermediate class. Gerald himself was granted access into the elite class as mentioned before.

However, among the thousand over people who had attempted to enroll within the academy, Gerald was actually the only person who was qualified enough to enter the elite class! From that, it was evident how strict the Leicom Academy truly was...

There were only a few dozen students who had ever managed to enter Leicom's Academy's elite class, and each of them had at least entered the Fifth-soul-rank of the Sage Realm.

The dean of the academy himself had already attained the Seventh rank in the Avatar Realm. At that rank, he was already an individual who was not only capable of stepping into the void, but also transforming heaven and earth at will! That was the power of an Avatar...

As for the tutors and masters there, their strength ranged between the first to fifth ranks within the Avatar Realm. With how strong even the educators there were, it was no wonder why the Leicom Academy was the Leicom Continent's symbol of power...

It was sometime later when a few masters could be seen talking to the dean in the academy's main hall.

Shortly after, Master Ykink entered the scene. After bowing respectfully toward each of them, he then sat down before declaring, "Dean, and Masters! The recruitment test for this year has ended! The results are... Four hundred new students in the beginner class, two hundred in the intermediate one, and as for the elite class... We only have one new student!"

Hearing that, the four masters in the hall instantly looked surprised. They hadn't expected so few students to pass the test! What more, there was only a single person who had managed to enter the elite class!

Chapter 1678

"...Is there truly nobody else who was able to qualify entering the elite class? Only a single person was able to withstand three moves...?" asked an old master seated at the side—who had a long purple robe on—who went by the name of Master Jizo.

With the strength of a person who had entered the Third rank of the Avatar Realm, Master Jizo was one of the masters teaching the elite class in the academy.

"While it's unfortunate that that's the case, the truth is, not only did that student manage to withstand three moves, but he even ended up defeating his opponent! With how strong he was, I have a feeling that he's already entered the Fifth-soul-rank within the Sage Realm!" replied Karsten.

"What? He actually managed to defeat a representative of our academy?" exclaimed Master Jizo in surprise.

Even the other three masters found themselves exchanging glances with each other. To think that their newest elite class student would have such amazing power...

They were right to be surprised. After all, throughout the academy's many years, Gerald was the first and only person who had managed to defeat a representative selected by the academy!

"What's his name, Karsten?" asked Sumeru, the dean of the academy.

"Gerald Crawford, sir!"

"Very well! Bring him over so that we can meet him!" ordered Sumeru.

"Right away!" replied Master Ykink as he immediately left to bring Gerald over.

Not long after, he returned with Gerald, and upon bowing again, he then introduced, "Dean and Masters, I present to you, Gerald Crawford!"

Following that, he then turned to look at Gerald before adding, "That there, is Dean Sumeru, Gerald! The other four are the masters of the elite class! Here we have Master Jizo, Master Temple, Master Yushin, and Master Vale!"

After being introduced, Gerald then bowed before greeting, "It's a pleasure to be within the presence of my dean and masters! I, Gerald Crawford, will be in your care starting today!"

Seeing how polite Gerald was, all five of them showed satisfied expressions on their faces.

With the introductions now over, Sumeru cut straight to the chase and asked, "So... I heard that you defeated our academy's representative! Is that true?"

Nodding in response, Gerald then replied, "It is, Dean Sumeru!"

"Just so you're aware, aside from you, there hasn't been a candidate who's been able to defeat a representative from our academy from the day the academy began! With that in mind, could you tell me what your true level of cultivation is?" asked Sumeru.

Appearing to hesitate for a brief moment, Gerald then replied, "...I've currently managed to enter the Fifth-soul-rank in the Sage Realm, Dean Sumeru!"

Naturally, that was a lie. The truth was, Gerald had already entered the Ninth-soul-rank in the Sage Realm. As for why the others hadn't caught on, it was because Gerald had actively been concealing his true power.

"I see. No wonder you were able to defeat our representative! A Fifth-soul-rank Sage... You're definitely a strong one, even among your future classmates in the elite class!" said Sumeru as he nodded in satisfaction.

"I'm flattered to hear that, dean!" replied Gerald with a smile.

"Nicely said! Now then, since you're going to be a student in the elite class, you may now choose any of the four masters here to be your tutor!" said Sumeru.

Chapter 1679

Upon hearing that, Gerald turned to look at the four masters sitting before him... Seeing that, the masters straightened their backs, anticipating Gerald's choice.

However, even after a while had passed, Gerald didn't appear to have his choice made.

With all five of them getting increasingly confused, Sumeru eventually asked, "...Are you unable to make a choice, Gerald?"

Forcing on a slightly awkward smile, Gerald then replied, "...Dean Sumeru, am I only allowed to choose among these four masters...?"

"You...! Are you looking down on us, kid?!" shouted Master Jizo as he glared at Gerald, clearly irritated by Gerald's question.

Keeping his cool, Gerald then explained, "I'm afraid you misunderstand me, Master Jizo. I wouldn't dare look down upon any of you four masters! I'm just asking to see if there's a better choice for me!"

"Hmm? What better choice could you possibly be looking for?" asked Sumeru in a rather playful tone. This young man was rather special...

Hearing that, Gerald then asked, "...Well, I wonder if you'd be interested in taking a student, Dean Sumeru..."

"...Kid, if you haven't already noticed, Dean Sumeru is the head of the Leicom Academy! How imprudent do you have to be to request for that?!" snarled Master Jizo.

Watching as all this played out, Master Ykink—who was still standing by Gerald's side—found himself getting increasingly terrified. To think that Gerald would be daring enough to say such things!

Sumeru was the dean of Leicom Academy! The highest-ranked individual of this prestigious place! There was no way he was going to accept a student just like that!

Surprisingly enough, Sumeru hardly appeared angered by Gerald's request. On the contrary, he was actually displaying a satisfied smile!

"While you're certainly a brazen one, you're the first to make such a direct request before me! Not bad!" replied Sumeru with a chuckle.

Realizing that Sumeru was actually subtly praising Gerald, the four masters found themselves momentarily stunned. After all, this was their first time seeing Sumeru so interested in a student.

"I've never taken a student before, you know? I guess that changes today! With that, I declare that you, Gerald, will be my one and only student!" declared Sumeru while looking straight into Gerald's eyes.

And just like that, all four masters found their eyes widening even more! To think that he would actually make an exception for Gerald! How unexpected!

"Thank you, Dean Sumeru! No, thank you, dear teacher!" replied Gerald with great respect.

Since he had decided to enroll in the Leicom Academy, Gerald was determined to be the top student. With that in mind, just having one of the four masters be his teacher wasn't enough. He had planned to have the dean be his master from the very beginning!

Now that it had been agreed upon, Gerald's status within the academy would surely skyrocket...

Chapter 1680

Following that, a golden wooden token flew out from Sumeru's pocket and hovered before Gerald's face...

"That there, is a wooden token exclusively for you. It serves as a symbol of your identity within the Leicom Academy. Also, since you're my only student, you'll have access to all the study resources of the academy!" explained Sumeru as he officially granted those privileges to Gerald.

Being a student of the dean, Gerald could pretty much do whatever he wanted in the academy. It was truly a noble position to have...

Even so, Gerald naturally cared little about the fame aspect. He was honestly more excited about the fact that he could use the academy's study resources anytime and any way he pleased. With that privilege, Gerald would surely be able to master more skills and secret techniques, hence allowing him to improve himself much faster.

With that said, Sumeru then ordered, "Karsten! Clean up the pavilion in the east court! From today onward, that will be Gerald's private residence!"

"Right away, dean! I'll be leading Gerald there immediately!" replied Karsten without even a second thought.

After Karsten led Gerald out of the main hall, the four masters turned to look at Sumeru, clearly unhappy with his decision.

"Why did you choose to accept Gerald as your student, dean...?" asked Master Jizo in a puzzled tone.

For context, never had any of the academy's deans accepted personal students. With that in mind, the fact that the dean made an exception for Gerald was definitely mind boggling.

Chuckling in response, Sumeru then replied, "Couldn't the rest of you tell? He isn't in the Fifth-soul-rank of the Sage Realm at all! He's been actively suppressing his true power!"

Upon hearing that, all four of the masters instantly grew curious.

"...If that's the case, then... How strong is he actually?" asked Master Jizo.

"From what I've been able to tell, he should have already entered the Ninth-soul-rank of the Sage Realm! What more, he's already showing signs of successfully breaching the Avatar Realm!" replied Sumeru, instantly shocking the four masters even more.

Even the most capable students in the Leicom Academy were only able to enter the Eighth-soul-rank of the Sage Realm. If what Sumeru had said was true, then Gerald most certainly qualified to be the dean's student...

Now that he was aware of all this, Master Jizo's mood instantly changed for the better as he said, "...If that's really the case, then Gerald's already the most talented student of our academy ever since it started! There's just no contesting his strength!"

Still, what a pity it was that Gerald didn't choose him to be his master. If Gerald had chosen him instead of the dean, Master Jizo would've surely gained a higher status and more bragging rights within the academy...

Understanding what social value Gerald now held, Master Juzo decided that he had to form a good relationship with Gerald no matter what.

Sometime later, Gerald arrived at the pavilion in the east court under Master Ykink's guidance.

While the pavilion had previously been used as a storage room to keep miscellaneous items, Sumeru had ordered for it to be cleaned up to be turned into Gerald's personal residence. After all, as a student of the dean, there was no way he was allowing Gerald to stay with the other students from the lower classes. That was simply too degrading to even think of!

Seeing how thick the dust was inside the pavilion, Gerald couldn't help but say, "I'm assuming the pavilion's been left vacant for quite a while, Master Ykink..."

Nodding in response, Master Ykink then replied, "Indeed! Also, you don't have to refer to me as master anymore. Since you're now the dean's student, you're no longer of low status!"

Hearing that, Gerald then chuckled before humbly saying, "You're exaggerating things, Master Ykink! While it's true that I'm now the dean's student, I'm essentially still a student here! With that in mind, I still have to respect you, a teacher of the academy!"

When Master Ykink heard him, a smile appeared on his face.

His impression toward Gerald was getting better and better now. After all, his status now was different as he was a student of the dean.

"Master Ykink, living here alone is a bit boring. Can I get a few people to live here with me? I have some friends studying in the academy as well!"

After thinking for a while, Gerald proposed to Karsten.

"Um... This..."

Master Ykink showed a doubtful face immediately.

Such a thing had never happened in the academy before, as Gerald's identity was different from the rest.

Gerald took out a Heaven's Apple from his storage ring immediately and gave it to Karsten.

"Master Ykink, this is a token of appreciation from me. Please help me with this!" Gerald pleaded with Karsten.

The moment Kasten saw Gerald taking out a Heaven's Apple, he was dumbfounded.

He never expected Gerald to have a holy fruit.

"A Heaven's Apple! Where... where did you get this?!" Karsten looked at Gerald in surprise and asked.

In the whole of Leicom Continent, there was only one place that grew Heaven's Apples. Naturally, Kasten Ykink would know about it. However, he was very surprised that Gerald actually had one.

"Oh, someone gave it to me!"

Gerald smiled slightly and explained briefly.

Nevertheless, Karsten could sense that Gerald was hiding something, but he did not want to question him any further.

Since Gerald was so sincere, he was very willing to help him with it. So, he quickly took the Heaven's Apple from Gerald and secured it in his pocket.

The Heaven's Apple was such a precious thing that not just anyone could get. Karsten would of course accept the gift.

"Just tell me, Gerald. Who are the few that you want to live here with you? I shall make the arrangements for you!"

After that, Karsten agreed right away.

Gerald leaned closer to Karsten and whispered three names into Karsten's ear.

"Alright, no problem. I'll make the arrangements now. But Gerald, please keep this between just the two of us. You shouldn't let the others know about this, or else the dean and the masters would blame me for it!"

Karsten did not forget to remind Gerald.

Gerald understood this well. He knew that this was not an honorable thing to do, but he didn't want to live alone in this place.

Besides, Zelig, Nori, and Cyril were his friends. When he had such a good thing, of course he should share it with them. Moreover, Gerald didn't want them to live here uncomfortably.

"Then, all is settled. Wait here first, and I will make arrangements for them to come and live here with you!"

Karsten instructed Gerald one last time before turning around and leaving.

Then, Gerald sat outside the pavilion and waited.

After ten minutes or so, he saw Karsten coming to the pavilion again with his three friends.

"Gerald!"

At the sight of Gerald, Nori couldn't help but shout. She ran and skipped forward happily.

"Gerald, I shall not disturb you all now. You can clean up on your own. Tell me if you need anything!" Karsten did not want to disturb them anymore, so he left after advising them.

Looking at how Karsten treated Gerald with such respect, Nori and the other two were shocked.

"Gerald, what have you done to make Master Ykink treat you with such respect? And why are you here? What did you call us here for?"

Chapter 1682

Nori asked Gerald three questions in succession.

Gerald's lips curled upward, and he said to them, "From now on, this place will be our residence. I am now the student of the dean!"

Hearing this, the three were even more amazed.

"Brother Gerald, are you kidding with us again? Are you really the student of the dean?" Cyril asked, looking at Gerald suspiciously.

"Well, I know you won't believe me right away. Here, let me show you something. This is the special wooden token the dean gave me. If you still don't believe me, you can go and ask Master Ykink!"

As Gerald was talking, he fished out the special wooden token Sumeru had given to him from his pocket and showed it to them.

Now, Nori, Zelig, and Cyril finally believed him. No wonder Master Ykink was so respectful toward Gerald. Evidently, this was the reason behind it.

"Gerald, you're so cool! You actually become the student of the dean, plus, you get to live in such a good place!" Nori praised Gerald and looked at him with admiration.

"Ha! Ha!"

Gerald chuckled.

"But now, you will all live here together with me. That way, I won't be so lonely!"

Hearing Gerald's words, Nori, Zelig, and Cyril were taken aback. They didn't expect that Gerald would let them live here with him.

Soon, the four friends roughly cleaned up the place and went to the canteen for dinner.

In Leicom Academy, there was a place specially designed for them to have meals. It was the same as the one on earth, just that the only difference was that it was in another world.

The four friends went to the canteen and took their food. Then, they sat together to eat and chat.

"Get out of the way! It's the elite class's turn to have a meal. Get lost, all of you!"

Right then, a furious and cold voice was heard.

They were all students from the elite class. Just by taking a look at them, they already felt that these people were very arrogant and domineering.

The students there quickly left when they saw the students from the elite class. Nobody dared to offend them.

"Gerald, they don't seem to be friendly. What should we do?" Nori looked at Gerald and asked.

The others might be scared of the elite class, but not Gerald. Gerald was a student of the dean, so his status was even higher than those students. Moreover, Gerald was strong, so why must he fear them?

"Just ignore them. Let's continue eating!"

Gerald said calmly. Then, they continued to eat their meals.

Seeing that Gerald and his friends had remained in their seats, the few students from the elite class walked toward them and surrounded the four of them,

"Hey, you four. Didn't you understand what we said? It's the elite class's turn for meals now. If you know who you are, get lost, then. Otherwise, don't blame us for being unfriendly!"

A man with a buzzcut haircut glared at them and scolded them in a cold tone.

These elite students were roughly Three- or Four-soul-rank of Sage Realm. They were more or less strong.

Right after the man with the buzzcut haircut had finished talking, he was flung into the sky by a strong force.

The one who had struck him was none other than Gerald.

"Where did that wild dog come from? This is a shared eating place. This is not the territory of the elite class!"

Gerald squeezed out the words coldly.

Immediately, the other elite students around prepared to fight.

All at once, swords were drawn, and the smell of fire was very strong. A big battle could erupt at any time.

"Kid, you must be tired of living!" The man said furiously. As he said that, he slammed his fist toward Gerald.

Before he could touch Gerald, Gerald gave him a swift slap and sent him flying out. The man fell heavily on the table, splitting it into two halves.

"Stop!"

Right then, a serious voice was heard.

The master of the voice was Master Ykink.

He came in through the door and walked toward Gerald in quick steps.

Seeing the arrival of Master Ykink, everyone fell into silence and dared not act hastily. The few elite students even lowered their heads.

"Master Ykink!"

Everyone at the scene greeted him.

Karsten approached Gerald and asked with a serious face, "What's going on? Who let you fight in the canteen?"

Although Gerald held a special status, he still had to act stern in front of other people.

"Master Ykink, it's those elite students who started it. We were having our meals here, and they chased us out right after they came in, saying that it was the elite students' turn to have their meal!"

Gerald stood still steadily and explained it to Master Ykink.

Upon hearing this, Master Ykink frowned even deeper. Then, he turned to the elite students and glared at them.

"The canteen is a shared place. Since when has it become your place for meals?" questioned Master Ykink.

The elite students did not dare to refute this. Although they were in the elite class, they did not dare to offend Master Ykink.

"We're sorry, Master Ykink. We were wrong!"

The man with the buzzcut haircut got up and admitted his mistake cautiously.

However, his heart was burning with anger. He felt very embarrassed, and his heart was filled with hatred toward Gerald. He decided he absolutely had to find a chance to get his revenge.

"Let's all disperse. No more next time!" Master Ykink admonished them sternly.

After that, the man with the buzzcut haircut quickly left the canteen with his gang.

After they had left, Master Ykink turned around and looked at Gerald.

"Gerald, you have to be careful with them. The boy with the buzzcut haircut is an elite student of Master Jizo. He's called Landon Zukerberg. He's a troublemaker in the academy who always bullies others. Also, he likes to play dirty tricks!" Master Ykink warned Gerald.

Gerald nodded and replied, "Don't worry, Master Ykink. I, Gerald Crawford, do not fear such people. If they come to me, I'll handle them!"

"Right. Gerald, there will be a contest soon. All of you better get ready!"

Before he left, Master Ykink reminded them again.

"Okay!"

Gerald nodded.

The four did not expect that they would have a contest so soon after just joining the academy.

Chapter 1685-1712

However, this contest was not that simple.

The academy would hold this event every year after the enrollment of new students. This was also to test the students' true ability. It would be carried out in the form of a duel between students from the beginner to the elite classes.

Soon, two days had passed.

And today was the very day of the contest at Leicom Academy.

Everyone in the academy gathered in the square. The beginner class sat in the east corner, the intermediate in the west corner, and the elite class in the south corner.

As for Gerald, he sat beside Dean Sumeru.

Seeing Gerald sitting beside Sumeru, everyone was in shock. They were curious about what his status was so much so that he was receiving such good treatment.

"Fellow students, today is the annual martial arts contest of our academy after the enrollment of the new students. As always, the students from three different levels will join the contest and duel with each other!"

After that, Master Ykink came forward and explained the flow of the event to the students.

"Next, let me introduce you to one person. He's the student of our dean, Gerald Crawford. He will join this contest as well. You will have the chance to duel with him later!" Master Ykink introduced Gerald to the other students.

The whole crowd was stirred up at once with all the people talking about the same thing.

Who would have thought that Gerald would become a student of the dean? As far as they knew, the dean had never taken a student under his guidance. And now, Gerald had become the first one. This made them wonder how strong Gerald was.

“Master Ykink, I have a question. If we beat him, does that mean that we will also become the dean’s student?”

Suddenly, a student from the elite class stood up and asked Master Ykink.

Master Ykink was stunned after hearing the question. He turned and looked at Dean Sumeru.

Sumeru pondered for a moment before standing up and saying, “Dear students, anyone who can defeat him will become my student!”

Upon his words, it once again caused a stir among the students down the stage. It was clearly a rare opportunity for all of them. Thinking of becoming the dean’s students just by defeating Gerald, they were very much willing to do it.

However, it would not be that easy, as it was impossible for them to defeat Gerald.

“Great. Next, let’s start with the first duel between a beginner student and an intermediate student. I shall invite the two classes to send out their respective students to the centre of the square!” Master Ykink said to the students immediately.

Having said that, a student from each of the classes walked to the centre of the square.

It was a battle between a beginner and an intermediate right in the first round. Although the contest

might seem unfair, it wasn't. In truth, the distribution of the students of different strengths varied among the three levels, so there might be some strong and powerful characters in the beginner class.

Soon, the duel between the two students at the centre of the square started.

It was worth mentioning that the student from the intermediate class was quite satisfactory. Whether it was his attack skills or speed, he was more excellent than the beginner student.

Even so, the beginner student was not easy to deal with either, and he didn't get defeated too soon.

The two students fought for a few rounds before the intermediate student finally defeated the beginner student and won the battle.

Regardless, the beginner student's performance was considered quite good. It was just that there was still a small gap between his ability and his opponent's.

"Well, the victory of the first round goes to the intermediate student! Next, for the second round, let's welcome a beginner student and an elite student!"

With the first duel ended, Master Ykink announced the second match.

A beginner student actually had to fight against an elite student in the second round. It seemed to be too demanding.

Naturally, nobody from the beginner class dared to step forward. "I will do it!"

Suddenly, a voice rang out from among the beginner students.

Gerald found the voice very familiar, so he looked in the direction of the voice immediately.

It turned out to be Zelig.

Gerald didn't expect that Zelig would dare to come forward, knowing that this match was between a beginner and an elite, whose level of strengths would be apparently wide.

"What's your name?" Master Ykink looked at Zelig and asked.

"Zelig Lear!" He blurted out his name.

Then, a student from the elite side came out. He was none other than Lev Bayfield, who had recently joined the elite class.

Lev Bayfield and Zelig Lear were both from Jaellatra, but Lev was slightly stronger than Zelig.

Zelig was currently in the Rune Realm, whereas Lev had already broken into the Sage Realm. Hence, there was a big gap between them in terms of power.

Lev's lips curled upward into a wry smile, thinking that he had finally gotten the chance to torture Zelig.

Although they were both people from Jaellatra, the Lear family was more influential than the Bayfield family. This was also another reason Lev looked down upon Zelig, as he felt that it was absurd for the young master of the Lear family to be so weak.

"Yo, Young Master Lear, we finally meet again. But be careful, don't blame me for showing no mercy!"

Lev walked forward and stood in front of Zelig as he spoke, looking at him with a grim smile.

Zelig ignored what Lev said. He knew what Lev was thinking in his mind. He must have seen him, so he had deliberately stepped forward to fight with him. He had to be planning to humiliate him since he had gotten the chance.

Even though Zelig knew his ability was weaker, he would not retreat nor feel scared. He would resist Lev's attacks with all his might.

"Get ready, the match is about to start!"

Master Ykink cued Zelig and Lev.

Zelig and Lev got back to their respective sides, forming a ten-meter distance between them so that both of them would have a chance to react.

Meanwhile, Gerald was looking at them from above. He couldn't help but start worrying.

Gerald was aware of Zelig's strength. This match would most probably end with Zelig's defeat since Lev was a strong opponent in the Sage Realm.

However, Gerald could not intervene and stop it since this was the rule of the contest.

So, Gerald could only hope that Zelig would be able to withstand the attacks and not lose too terribly.

"And it starts now!"

After that, the second match started officially with Master Ykink's announcement.

Lev leaped forward immediately, heading toward Zelig at top speed.

Lev was in front of Zelig in the blink of an eye, drawing out his sword and stabbing it at Zelig.

The speed of a Sage was, of course, faster than a Chakra King.

But luckily, Zelig had been highly alert since just now. He took a few steps backward immediately and dodged Lev's first attack.

"Huh. It looks like your reaction is fast enough!"

Lev smirked and smiled disdainfully as he mocked Zelig.

Having said that, Lev leaped into the sky and rotated his body one hundred and eighty degrees. Then, swinging the sword in his hand so fast that it formed a flower-like shadow, he attacked Zelig. Zelig immediately shone his sword to shield himself.

"Cascading petals!" Lev yelled.

This was the name of Lev's move, and the sword's shadows cascaded everywhere from the sky like flower petals, rendering Zelig unable to determine which one was the real sword.

After a few seconds, Zelig's shirt was already torn and ripped up with marks from the sword everywhere, and he seemed to be extremely battered and confused.

At this moment, it was already known who had won and lost—it was obvious that Lev had won this round.

“Alright, both of you can stop now. We already have a winner!”

Master Ykink instantly yelled and announced the result of the battle.

“Lev Bayfield from the elite class won the second round!”

Although Zelig was unsettled and unwilling to admit defeat, his ability was indeed not as good as Lev’s, so he could only accept the result.

“Hmph. Zelig Lear, I’m telling you, you’re going to lose to me forever, so, from now on, you’d better scam whenever you see me around the academy. Otherwise, I’ll beat you up every time I see you!”

Lev warned Zelig coldly as he pointed his finger at him before everyone else at the scene.

His words caused a surge amongst the crowd again. Who would have expected that Lev would be so reckless to announce such ruthless words in front of everyone, not to mention the headmaster and great masters were there as well.

However, these were all normal happenings. Dean Sumeru and the other great masters wouldn’t care that much as the competition was really strong here. After all, students from the elite class indeed had higher statuses than those from the beginner class.

Still, Gerald didn’t think the same way as them. He felt that Lev was too arrogant and ruthless for his own good, and this made Gerald a bit enraged.

Zelig was his friend, and Lev was obviously insulting his friend. Naturally, this made Gerald feel unsettled,

and he decided to avenge Zelig's dignity and justice.

"Okay, for the third round, it will be the elite class versus the dean's selected student—Gerald Crawford. I would like the elite class to select someone among yourselves to fight, and for Gerald to wait patiently in the center of the square!"

The battle was continued with master Karsten's announcement of the third battle.

Gerald knew his chance was here, and he stood up instantly, leaping right toward the center of the square swiftly, becoming the center of everyone's attention.

Everyone wanted to see how incredible Gerald's ability was.

Now, the students in the elite class were all chattering and having a commotion. A lot of them wanted to fight against Gerald as they were all tempted by the reward.

"Dean and fellow grand masters, I have a request!"

At that moment, Gerald yelled as he stared right at the headmaster and the four grand masters.

"Gerald, please let us know!"

Dean Sumeru asked instantly.

"Can I choose someone from the elite class for the battle!" Gerald made a request.

His words immediately made students from the elite class unsatisfied, and they felt as though Gerald

was too arrogant. This simply meant that he didn't really value any of their abilities at all.

"Okay, then. Tell me, who do you wish to choose?"

After all, he was still the dean's own selected student, so of course he would treat him slightly more special. He then swiftly asked Gerald.

"Him! Lev Bayfield! He's the one I wish to choose!"

Right after Sumeru's sentence had ended, Gerald immediately announced a name as he pointed right at Lev, who had just sat down.

Right at that instant, everyone's eyes were on Lev. None of them had expected that Gerald would actually choose Lev as his opponent, and this made them astounded.

Lev, on the other hand, was excited and felt as if his chance was finally here. After all, if he beat Gerald, he would be the dean's selected student himself.

Under everyone's gaze, Lev stood up slowly.

Lev walked right toward Gerald in front of everyone.

"Who would have thought that you would choose me. Looks like the position as the dean's selected student will be mine for sure!"

Lev ridiculed Gerald with utmost confidence.

They hadn't even started the battle, and Lev was already acting so arrogantly.

Gerald, on the other hand, wasn't really bothered by it. In his eyes, Lev was just a buffoon, so he didn't really have to care about his arrogance.

The strong ones always held a low profile instead of showing off in a high-key way. If not, that would be stupid, and that referred to none other than Lev himself.

"Both sides, please get ready!"

Master Ykink spoke up and signalled at Gerald and Lev.

Hearing Master Ykink's instructions, Lev immediately entered a fighting stance, waiting to attack anytime. Once the start was announced, he would immediately attack Gerald.

Gerald was as calm and composed as he had ever been with his eyes closed while standing at the same place, without even a slight change in his expression.

Seeing Gerald's action, everyone around them wondered whether this meant that it was a sign that Gerald was surrendering?

"The battle starts now!"

After a few seconds, Master Ykink announced.

As soon as those words fell, Lev took action instantly as he shoved his sword out and jetted right toward Gerald.

Gerald, on the other hand, was still standing at the same place calmly without moving at all. It was almost as if he was waiting for Lev to stab him.

Just as everyone thought that Gerald was going to lose for sure, Gerald opened his eyes suddenly and extended two fingers as he held Lev's sword in between them almost instantly.

The sharp head of the sword was just a few millimetres from Gerald's eyes! What a move right at that juncture!

"What?!"

Lev was extremely astounded.

He wanted to take back his sword but suddenly realized that he couldn't take it back at all. It was as though the sword was frozen in mid-air.

Immediately after, Gerald bent and snapped Lev's sword with his fingers.

Without waiting for Lev to react, Gerald smacked Lev's chest with his other palm.

Lev flew backward immediately in an arc across the sky before crashing onto the ground, blood leaking from his lips.

Gerald didn't intend to take Lev's life with his palm. After all, this was a battle test and it should be light, not life-and-death in any way. Therefore, Gerald held back, otherwise, Lev would be an ice-cold corpse by now.

"Gerald has won!"

Master Ykink announced loudly.

Right at this moment, Dean Suneru had a satisfied smile on his face as he started clapping.

Seeing how the dean was clapping his hands, the four grand masters and other students started to clap as well. Instantly, thunderous applause could be heard from the scene.

Gerald had won without a teeny hint of suspense.

Now, everyone knew that Gerald truly had strong abilities, and it was not just a rumor. He was indeed worthy enough to be the dean's selected student.

"I'm not satisfied. I want to compete against him!"

Right at that moment, a deep voice was heard from the elite class.

"It's Master Ray!"

"Master Ray is going to fight, looks like there'll be a good battle to watch!"

"Yeah! Master Ray is incredible, of course he won't accept this willingly!"

After discovering the owner of the voice, an uproar appeared amongst the crowd again.

The man who was being discussed by everyone was Ray Leighton, the best student in the elite class. His ability had reached the Seventh-soul-rank in the Sage Realm.

Ray got up and walked out of the circle coldly toward the center of the square to stand before Gerald, and he pointed at Gerald icily as he said, "I, Ray Leighton, want to challenge you. If you win, I will willingly listen and follow you. If I win, you have to scam from this position of yours and be my underling!"

Ray's words were extremely arrogant with a dominant vibe.

After listening to him, Gerald wasn't angry at all. On the contrary, he thought that Ray was very interesting.

Someone like Ray was direct and straightforward, and he would express his dissatisfaction outright instead of doing something dirty behind one's back. This deserved other's respect.

"Okay, I accept!"

Gerald didn't reject him and accepted it immediately.

Without waiting for Master Ykink to announce the start of the battle, Ray charged right toward Gerald like a ferocious tiger with a crushing force like a tornado.

Ray had a buffy physique and muscular body, and he crashed his fist right toward Gerald heavily.

Ray, who had reached the Seventh-soul-rank in the Sage Realm, already had strong power. If one really got hit by his fist, his bones would be crushed into pieces for sure.

However, Gerald liked fighting against opponents like this. This was because he could test his body's strength at the same time.

The next moment, Gerald thrust his fist out as well.

Gerald matched his fist with Ray.

Right in that instant, the sand around the square flew everywhere, and heatwaves were created, surrounding the two in between.

The ground beneath both of them was already cracked and collapsed, numerous rocks flying up into the air. It could be already be seen how powerful the aftereffect of them clashing against each other was.

After that, dust and the sand dissipated.

Everyone saw Gerald and Ray both standing in the same spot, but Ray seemed to be a bit sick.

If they were nearer, it could be seen how Ray's purlicue was already torn with blood streaming out of the wound endlessly, dripping onto the cracked ground.

With just one move, the winner and loser could already be determined.

The two stood still for a few seconds facing each other before Ray finally retracted his fist slowly.

"I've lost!"

His words made everyone turn silent.

Everyone was still in surprise and disbelief.

Ray had actually surrendered?!

This result wasn't something that could be expected by anyone. One should know that Ray was the strongest man in Leicom Academy, and now, he had actually lost to Gerald, which he had admitted himself willingly. What astonishing news!

"You're really powerful! You have my respect!"

Ray smiled and told Gerald.

"You're not bad yourself. I hope we can be friends!"

Gerald smiled back politely as he replied to Ray, stretching out his hand.

"Of course. It would be my honor to be friends with you!" Ray stretched his hand out for a handshake with Gerald without thinking twice.

At that moment, the two were like the strong ones sympathizing with each other. The truly strong ones were always respected by everyone.

Gerald felt that Ray would be a worthy friend. There were not many people as magnanimous as Ray anymore.

"Okay, that's the end of our battle test today. Tomorrow will be the practice test in Heaven Tower, I hope everyone can get a good rest tonight!"

After the end of the day, the sky had begun to turn dark by the time Master Ykink made this announcement.

Then, everyone left the scene.

Heaven Tower was the most powerful challenge in Leicom Academy, and there were twenty levels.

Up until now, no one had been able to reach the top successfully. Even Dean Sumeru had been halted at the eighteenth level while the four grand masters had stopped at the seventeenth.

Every floor had different challenges for different people, so no one knew exactly what kind of challenge would be given by Heaven Tower. Hence, no one knew how to even cheat.

That night, Gerald was called to Sumeru's bedroom.

"Dean, you wanted to see me?"

Gerald entered the room respectfully as he asked Sumeru, who was meditating on the meditation deck.

Sumeru opened his eyes slowly and looked at Gerald with a smile on his face.

"Gerald, you did well this afternoon. I'm very satisfied as your teacher, but are you prepared for the challenge tomorrow at Heaven Tower?"

After praising Gerald, the dean asked Gerald with concern.

"Dean, I've listened to Master Ykink introduce Heaven Tower in a simple way, but I'm curious, what kind of challenges are there inside? Please teach me about this, teacher!"

Gerald instantly asked Dean Sumeru curiously.

“Hoho!” Sumeru chuckled lightly.

“Heaven Tower was created by the ancient god of Astral Traveler in Leicom Academy. After the god of Astral Traveler stepped into the human world, Heaven Tower became the most symbolic feature of the Leicom Academy. Every scholar who enters Leicom Academy has to pass the challenge of Heaven Tower. Only then can they be deemed as students of Leicom Academy!”

“About the challenges inside, I can’t tell you anything. Heaven Tower is fascinating, and the challenges it offers vary from person to person. You’ll only know when you go inside yourself!”

Sumeru didn’t answer Gerald’s question and instead told him the general information about Heaven Tower.

“Dean, I heard from Master Ykink that you stopped at the eighteenth floor, right?”

Gerald asked Sumeru carefully.

“That’s right. It gets harder as you proceed further up Heaven Tower. It was tens of years ago when I reached the eighteenth level. From then onward, I never went into Heaven Tower anymore!” Dean Sumeru nodded and answered.

Sumeru’s words made Gerald more and more curious as he told himself that he would surpass the old in the future as a new generation.

Now that even Sumeru could only stop at the eighteenth level of Heaven Tower, he himself had to surpass Sumeru and reach the top of Heaven Tower to prove himself.

If the older generation couldn't make it, it didn't necessarily mean that the new generation couldn't do it as well. After all, times were always changing.

Subsequently, Sumeru took out a sachet from his sleeve and passed it to Gerald.

"Dean, what's this?"

Gerald asked curiously.

"This is a sachet I got from Heaven Tower back then, but I have never opened it before. Now, I want to give this to you. Maybe this can help you when you enter Heaven Tower, but you can only open and use it at the most critical and urgent moment. You must remember my words!" Sumeru reminded Gerald seriously.

"Yes. I'll keep that in mind, Dean!"

Gerald nodded automatically and promised him.

After their chat, Gerald left Sumeru's room.

After Gerald had left the room for a while, Sumeru waved his arm, and a starry sky map appeared right in front of his eyes instantly.

The starlight shone brightly on the map, but one couldn't see anything beneath those starlights.

"Messy starry map and diminishing starlight—looks like the catastrophe of Leicom Continent is bound to arrive soon!"

Sighing after throwing a last look at the map, Sumeru's expression turned complicated and sad.

But right at that moment, a bright white starlight appeared out of the blue in the starry map, shining brightly and eye-catchingly. "Could it be that Gerald will be the saint who will save our Leicom Continent?!"

Upon seeing the starlight, Sumeru couldn't help but become astonished.

Not long after, Gerald returned to the South Pavilion.

"Brother Gerald!"

Just as he reached the door, a familiar voice was heard from behind him.

The owner of that voice was none other than Ray Leighton, the man who had fought him this afternoon.

"Brother Ray, anything you need at this late hour?"

When he saw that it was Ray, Gerald became puzzled as he asked, not expecting Ray to come to find him.

"Hoho! Brother Gerald, I'm here to have a casual chat. Would you like to have a drink?"

Ray chuckled lightly as he shook the beer bottle in his hand.

Gerald smiled understandingly and nodded. "Sure. Come in, then!"

After that, Gerald led Ray inside the pavilion.

When they entered the pavilion, Nori and the two others were sitting inside.

"Gerald, you're back!"

Seeing Gerald arrive, Nori stood up and greeted him.

"Hmm? Isn't this Senior Ray?"

When they saw Ray, they all became surprised.

"Good day to you all!"

Ray greeted Nori and the two politely.

Then, the few people sat down as they drank and chatted.

Beer was, after all, something to bond people together and make friends without much effort. Gerald and the three were soon good friends with Ray, and the five were happy to meet each other as they talked while laughing, making it seem as if they had known each other for a long time already.

It was only until late at night before they finally fell asleep in the pavilion.

The next morning, with a ray of sunshine shining into the pavilion, Gerald and the four woke up.

Today was the day of Heaven Tower's practice test, and all newbies of Leicom Academy had to participate in the practice test.

Of course, Gerald was the one to bear the brunt.

As the dean's selected student, of course Gerald had to be the one kickstarting this.

At 9.15 am, all the trainees had gathered below Heaven Tower.

Heaven Tower stood tall amongst the clouds, striking and elegant.

"Today is the day where the new trainees will enter Heaven Tower for the practice test. Every newbie has to enter and accept the training. Regardless of the result, only those who accepted the training of Heaven Tower will be worthy enough to be students of our Leicom Academy!"

Master Ykink walked out and announced to the crowd beneath.

"The dean's selected student, Gerald Crawford, will be the first to enter Heaven Tower for the practice training!"

After receiving the instruction, Gerald stood up and walked toward the door of Heaven Tower to wait.

At that instant, the door of Heaven Tower opened, followed by a loud noise, the pitch-black environment inside displayed to everyone. No one could see what it looked like inside.

Gerald didn't say another word as he took a step to enter Heaven Tower.

Following Gerald's entrance, the tower door was shut instantly.

As the tower's doors were lowered, Gerald couldn't help but look around, attempting to gather his bearings. However, the pitch darkness made it impossible to see a thing...

Just as Gerald was wondering what to do next, a beam of light suddenly appeared from the tower! With how increasingly bright it was getting, the light's radiance was reminiscent of a raging bonfire...

Regardless, it wasn't long after before a man donning white clothes walked out from the light...

Seeing that, Gerald was prompted to ask, "...And you are?"

"I am the god of Astral Traveler in the Leicom Continent, and the form that you're currently seeing is the final primordial spirit that I've left behind in the Heaven Tower. I was summoned by your arrival!" explained the primordial spirit as it stared at Gerald.

"You're the god of Astral Traveler? And what do you mean my arrival summoned you?" replied Gerald, stunned by the sudden turn of events. For one, he definitely hadn't expected the person before him to be the legendary ancient god of Astral Traveler...

Chuckling when he heard that, the god of Astral Traveler simply extended his hand... before snapping his fingers.

And just like that, Gerald was greeted by the sight of countless stars! While it was most probably just a manifested illusion, it truly felt like he was currently standing in the middle of space...

Apparently not done yet, the god of Astral Traveler then waved his hand... Revealing another scene to

Gerald. A greatly unsettling one...

The continent was in ruins, complete shambles! With countless bones scattered across the lands and the sky layered with a blanket of dark clouds, Gerald felt a shiver run down his spine just from looking at all that...

'What the hell happened here...?' Gerald thought to himself.

Now curious out of his mind, Gerald was prompted to ask, "What... on earth happened here, god of Astral Traveler...?"

The second his question ended, an ethereal 'whir' could be heard, prompting Gerald to look at the source of the sound... and projected there, was the number, 'three hundred'.

Raising a slight brow, Gerald began wondering, 'Three hundred? What does that signify? Is it a secret code of some sort...?'

After a slight pause, the god of Astral Traveler then replied, "...This... is the fate of the world in exactly three hundred days..."

Upon hearing that, Gerald was rightfully shocked. Eyes widened and filled with incredulity, Gerald then asked, "...What? The world's falling into complete ruin by then?"

"Indeed. On the three hundredth day, Masrus, the demonic god will be revived... Following that, he'll surely take over the entire world! If he's allowed to do that, then not only will the Leicom Continent fall under his rule, but Jaellatra and the other continents will share that fate as well!" explained the god of Astral Traveler in a solemn tone.

Though Gerald felt that the claim was somewhat reminiscent of some legendary fairy tale, he knew that the god of Astral Traveler—of all people—wouldn't lie to him. With that in mind, that meant that the

world's fate was truly looking grim...

"...I see. God of Astral Traveler, I'm assuming you're showing me all this for a reason. Could it be that I'm capable of preventing all this suffering?" asked Gerald.

After all, the God of Astral Tower surely wouldn't have shown him all this without a proper reason. Could he be some prophesied savior for the new generation...?

"Your assumption is correct. Only you have the power to go against Masrus, and should you succeed, you'll surely become the savior of the world!" replied the god of Astra Traveler as he gave Gerald a determined look.

Utterly shocked by this sudden revelation, Gerald could only think, '...But... Why was I chosen to be the savior out of the blue...?' He simply found it weird how the world's fate suddenly concerned him.

"...Alright, but... Why me?" asked Gerald.

"It's because there exists an ancient will hidden within your body. If you manage to properly develop that will, then you'll surely be able to resist Masrus! With that in mind, you truly are the world's final hope!" explained the god of Astral Traveler in a patient tone.

Seeing the relevance of his words, Gerald then replied, "...And how do I develop that will?"

Hearing that, the god of Astral Traveler then cupped his hands together, causing a scroll of sorts to materialize there shortly after...

After being handed the scroll, Gerald noticed that there was a slot of sorts on it. It was quite apparent that something needed to be fitted inside it to open the scroll...

“That there is the Scroll of Stars... In order to unlock its secrets, you’ll first have to obtain an item known as the Scintillating Gem. While you’ll be able to begin developing the will in your body after you open the scroll, know that nobody’s ever been able to obtain or even locate the gem from the day it came into existence!” explained the god of Astral Traveler as he looked at Gerald with a serious gaze.

Upon hearing that, Gerald couldn’t help but look at the scroll for a little longer before storing it within his storage ring.

With that done, Gerald then turned to face the god of Astral Traveler before asking, “...Well, that aside, what exactly is the trial of the Heaven Tower?”

‘I came to participate in a trial, no? Who do I now feel like I’m here to receive a mission instead?’ Gerald thought to himself.

“I established the trials of Heaven Tower only as a front. My goal had always been to await the arrival of the destined individual, and you’ve finally come today. With that in mind, you naturally don’t have to go through the trial. After all, all the trials here are useless for you. Time is of the essence, so I’ll be sending you to the top of the tower immediately!” replied the god of Astral Traveler.

Hearing that, Gerald could only raise a slight brow as he bounded up the tower with extreme speed...

Seconds later, someone from the outside could suddenly be heard shouting, “...H-hey! Look up there! The top of the tower is shining!”

Realizing that what the person had said was true, Sumeru and the four great masters instantly expressed great shock. After all, the light—that everyone was now seeing—would only begin shining when someone managed to reach the top of the tower... With that in mind, Gerald must have been able to achieve that! How unexpected!

Ever since the trials were established hundreds of years ago, nobody had been able to fully scale the tower... Until today.

Moving back to Gerald, upon arriving at the top of the tower, Gerald was greeted by the sight of a sword that was emitting a white light.

Walking closer to the sword, Gerald watched as it instantly began quivering in place. In a sense, it almost seemed like it was behaving that way due to some telepathic link it had with Gerald...

Before he could get too close, the god of Astral Traveler appeared before Gerald again before saying, "That there is the Astrabyss Sword, and it'll function as your special weapon from today onward. Beside it, is a book that contains all the skills you can perform with the sword. I hope you'll use it wisely and master all the Astrabyss's skills. If you do, you'll definitely get much stronger!"

That was needless to say, of course, so Gerald simply nodded before continuing to walk toward the sword.

Now before the sword, Gerald heard as the god of Astral Traveler shouted, "Outstretch your hand and pull it out!"

Momentarily stunned by how commanding the god of Astral Traveler suddenly was, Gerald quickly shook out of it before firmly grasping the sword's hilt... Only to instantly feel a slight pain on his palm!

Unbeknownst to Gerald, the sword had caused a tiny cut to form on his palm, resulting in a single drop of his blood coming into contact with the sword's hilt...

The second that happened, the Astrabyss Sword immediately emitted an ethereal ring...

Releasing the hilt and taking a step back, Gerald then watched as the sword quickly began flailing wildly!

It only took the Astrabyss a few seconds to break from its restraints, and the second it was freed, it

instantly flew into Gerald's hand!

Instinctively holding onto the sword's hilt tightly, Gerald immediately began feeling a strong force surging into his elixir-of-life field from his palm... This feeling...

He was about to make a breakthrough!

Feeling the immense power continue surging into his elixir-of-life field, Gerald quickly sat on the floor and began meditating. With his eyes now closed, Gerald actively attempted to tame the immense power in his body...

To his dismay, he wasn't able to do it!

Momentarily feeling anxious, an idea suddenly came to Gerald as he thought, 'Wait, don't I have plenty of Heaven's apples?'

Quickly retrieving one from his storage ring, Gerald then bit into it.

The second he did, his entire body instantly felt cool and refreshed! As for the surging power from earlier, it was no longer pulsing wildly through him...

In other words, Gerald had successfully breached the Ninth-soul-rank of the Sage Realm! He was now finally at the first rank of the Avatar Realm!

With his body now brimming with power, Gerald could tell that he was much, much stronger than before.

"Congratulations for breaching into the Avatar Realm, Gerald. You now possess the power to enter God Transformation mode, a state where you momentarily grow inhumanly strong! Even so, you'll only be

able to use it when facing extreme situations. Consider it as a last resort to remain alive!” explained the god of Astral Traveler.

As the god of Astral Traveler had said, God Transformation was a skill that those from the Avatar Realm could use to defend themselves near death. A textbook example of how useful this ability was, was by using God Transformation to suddenly gain a massive boost in strength to hopefully turn the tables during a losing battle.

Of course, there were pros and cons to everything.

While the power of God Transformation was certainly nothing to scoff at, the user would go feeble for a rather long time after using it. With that in mind, it was wise to only use the tactic as a final resort.

“I appreciate the advice, god of Astral Traveler. Regardless, I definitely won’t disappoint you!” replied Gerald in a gratuitous tone as he bowed.

Seemingly satisfied with Gerald’s response as he laughed, the god of Astral Traveler then said, “Remember, you’re the world’s only hope! Use the next three hundred days wisely!”

Before Gerald could even reply, the god of Astral Traveler’s primordial spirit instantly disappeared. Now that its final mission had been fulfilled, the god of Astral Traveler could finally rest in peace...

And just like that, the burden of the world had been placed on Gerald’s shoulders, and he was the only one who knew about it...

Shortly after, the Heaven Tower’s entrance was reopened, and everyone watched as Gerald slowly made his way out...

By this point, his aura was immensely pressuring, and many from within the crowd had to shield their eyes from the waves of dust that repelled themselves from Gerald!

Sumeru himself—who was seated at the seat of honor—could only reveal a satisfied smile when he saw that. Gerald had definitely succeeded...

When noon came, Gerald could be seen standing in the middle of Leicom Academy's large hall. Naturally, Sumeru was once again seated at the seat of honor while the four major great masters sat at the side.

Beaming subtly as he looked at Gerald, Sumeru declared, "Congratulations for being the first person to ever fully scale Heaven Tower! With that in mind, I'm sure you now know why all the trials were held there in the first place."

"I do, Master, and four great masters! This is about the event that will be taking place in three hundred days, correct?" replied Gerald as he slowly looked at all five of them.

Hearing that, the four masters then turned to look at Sumeru as the dean nodded in response.

"So, you truly do know everything now... I suppose that means that you really are the destined person! With that in mind, are you ready to hold that responsibility, Gerald?" asked Sumeru as he stared closely at Gerald.

"I am! After some thought, I feel that locating the Scintillating Gem should be prioritized!" replied Gerald in a resolute tone.

He was placing priority on the gem since with it, he would be able to open the Scroll of Stars. Following that, Gerald would hopefully be able to quickly develop the hidden will in his body in order to stand a chance against Masrus when the demonic god appeared three hundred days later.

"While you're free to do things in whichever order you please, please remember that the clock is constantly ticking. If you can't locate the gem by the time the three hundred days are up, the only thing that awaits our world is ruin!" replied Sumeru without mincing any words.

"I understand, master! Also, in order to hasten the search, I'm thinking of banding together a small team! What do you think of that, master?" asked Gerald.

Gerald, for one, felt that doing things on his own again would surely make him feel lonely. With that in mind, Gerald was planning to bring Nori and the four others along in search of the Scintillating Gem.

"I see no issue with that. Go on ahead and select the members you see fit to be part of your team!" replied Sumeru.

Hearing that, Gerald then bade farewell to Sumeru and the four great masters before leaving the large hall to begin making his preparations.

Once they were sure that Gerald had left, Jizo couldn't help but look rather worriedly at Sumeru as he asked, "...Do you really think he'll be able to do it, dean?"

With the fate of the world on his shoulders, Gerald was most probably feeling immense pressure at the moment...

"...We simply have to believe in him and give him all the support he needs. Otherwise, the world will surely end in ruin!" replied Sumeru in a firm tone without giving Jizo a direct answer. Even so, what he meant was clear as day.

With that, all four of the major great masters nodded in understanding, prompting no further questions to be asked...

Sometime later, Gerald returned to the South pavilion. Upon entering, he saw that Nori and the other three were resting inside while chatting among themselves.

Upon realizing that Gerald had returned, the four of them immediately smiled at him before praising, "You're just way too powerful, Gerald! To think that you'd actually be able to get to the very top of the tower! Because of that feat, you're now immensely famous within the academy, and many are now looking up to you!"

Despite hearing that, Gerald really couldn't be bothered about such trivial fame. After all, there were much more important affairs to deal with at the moment.

Shaking his head, Gerald then stood before the four people and straightened his back before saying, "Alright, putting all that aside... Please listen carefully to what I'm about to say next. I'll be leaving the academy as soon as possible to start locating an item called the Scintillating Gem. With that in mind, I was wondering if all of you would be willing to come with me and help look for the gem. Don't worry, I've already gained the dean and the four major great masters' permission. What do you say?"

Hearing that, Nori and the others were momentarily stunned. After all, it was a lot to take in.

After a short while, Zelig snapped out of it before asking in a slightly puzzled tone, "The... Scintillating Gem? What exactly is that...? And why do we need to leave the academy all of a sudden to look for it?"

"I'm afraid I can't share the details with you just yet. However, I'll definitely do so one day. Regardless, my question remains. Are you willing to join me in my search? Do note that we may be facing a lot of troubles and dangers throughout the journey, so if you're reluctant, I understand and I won't try to force you to come along. I'm completely fine with going alone!" replied Gerald as he retained his serious gaze.

With how serious this affair was, Gerald wasn't even planning to make a joke to lighten up the mood.

Seeing that Gerald meant business, Nori and the others found themselves momentarily exchanging glances with each other.....I'm willing to join your team, Gerald! I'll follow you wherever you go!" declared Nori after a brief moment's thought.

"Count me in as well, Mr. Crawford!"

“We’re all willing to be part of this!”

Seeing that Nori had taken her stand, Zelig, Cyril, and Ray felt the urge to do the same.

Upon hearing their enthusiastic replies, Gerald couldn’t help but feel touched.

In all honesty, he had already factored in the chance that none of them would go with him. After all, the four people weren’t even long-time acquaintances of his. With that in mind, Gerald knew that it was already asking a lot for them to risk their lives just to help him.

Now that all of them were agreeing without so much as a second thought, however, it showed Gerald that they truly saw him as a friend. In fact, it also displayed how much they trusted in him.

“...Thank you... All of you. While I’d like to have a sentimental moment, there simply isn’t any time to waste. With that said, do hurry and start packing up! We leave in two hours!” declared Gerald.

Since time was of the essence, the faster they packed up their essentials and headed out, the sooner they could hopefully locate the Scintillating Gem.

While three hundred days may have sounded a lot, Gerald was well aware that the days they would spend searching for the gem would come and go extremely quickly. It certainly didn’t help that he didn’t even have any clues as to where the gem could be. With that in mind, the faster they acted, the higher the chances of them actually succeeding in finding the gem in time...

Regardless, after hearing Gerald’s order, all four of them hurried off to do as they were told.

Thankfully, exactly two hours later, all four of them regrouped with Gerald, fully prepared.

Following that, the five people made sure to bid goodbye to Sumeru and the four major great masters before finally leaving the Leicom Academy.

Immediately after leaving the academy, Gerald and the others made sure to stock up on food and drinks. Not knowing how long their journey was going to take, the more preparations they made, the better.

Once they got everything relevant that they could think of, their hunt for the gem officially began.

“...Speaking of which, where are we headed to first...?” asked Nori.

Since Gerald hadn't even told them where to begin looking, the four of them were feeling rightfully curious.

Upon hearing that, Gerald opened up the map and began inspecting it. It took him a while, but he eventually pointed at an area on the map before declaring, “We're going to start looking here! The South Wastelands!”

The South Wastelands was a desolate area located south of the Leicom Continent. Literally nobody inhabited that place, and few dared to venture there...

However, since Gerald had made his choice, Nori and the others simply agreed. With the location settled, all five of them immediately set off for the South Wastelands...

It took them half a day, but they eventually arrived at the border of the South Wastelands by evening.

Upon leaving the Leicom Continent, the five found that the place was as desolate as the rumors had claimed. No buildings and not even a single soul... The fact that evening was quickly turning to night definitely amplified the creepiness of the area.

Even so, the five simply continued walking on. After all, Gerald wasn't afraid of such things.

After walking for a while within the South Wastelands, the group came across a loess wall and decided that it was high time for them to take a temporary rest.

By that point, it was completely dark... A little too dark...

Raising a brow, Nori turned to look at the moon in the sky... Only to have a jaw drop.

"...H-hey! Look at the moon! Its shine stops right at the border of the Leicom Continent! The moon's rays can't reach us here at all!" shouted Nori as she pointed at the bright moon in the distance.

Realizing that what she had said was true, the other group members instantly found that fact to be rather mysterious and strange...The South Wastelands truly was an extraordinary place... To think that the moon's shine couldn't get in here! How utterly perplexing! Even so, it wasn't as though they could do anything about it.

With that in mind, Gerald and the others could only continue sitting there as they stared at the bright and beautiful moon...

Sometime later, Ray was scanning through the area when he suddenly shouted, "...Mr. Crawford, come quick! There's some kind of stone tablet here!"

Upon hearing that, Gerald and the other three immediately ran over to where Ray was. True to his words, all of them now saw an erect stone tablet before them...

Wiping the thick layer of dust off the tablet with his hand, Gerald noticed that a few words had been carved onto it.

Squinting his eyes to get a closer look, Gerald then declared, "The South Beast of the Wastelands!"

Immediately after Gerald read that out, an angered and ear-piercing roar could suddenly be heard coming from above them! As the roar continued resonating across the barren wastelands, an explosive sound was heard!

Following that, everyone could only watch wide-eyed as a massive black figure leaped out of the stone tablet!

Upon landing right before the five individuals, the creature's inhumanly strong landing caused the ground around them to quiver so much that it was difficult to even maintain their balance! What terrifying strength!

"W-what the hell is that thing...?" stuttered Nori as she looked at Gerald slightly fearfully.

"...I guess that's our South Beast!" replied Gerald as he stared at the humongous figure that somewhat resembled a lion.

To think that simply reading the text on the tablet would summon it! Judging from how angry it seemed, they must have awoken it from its nap!

"D*mn it, we need a proper light source! We can't even see it properly now!" grumbled Zelig as he frowned. Since the moon's rays were unable to pierce into South Wastelands, their vision was severely limited to only a few feet in front of them!

"Don't worry, I have a solution!" replied Gerald as he summoned his talisman paper and brush from his storage ring.

After swiftly painting a talisman, he then tossed it into the air, prompting the talismans to burst into a huge ball of fire!

Under the newly illuminated light source, everyone could now see the beast before them in full detail. With a huge, golden mane, the massive male lion's open jaws exposed its extremely sharp teeth for all to see. Fuming in anger, the lion continued glaring with its rage-filled eyes at all five of them... Though it didn't appear to be in an attacking stance.

Finding that fact to be slightly puzzling, Zelig was prompted to ask, "...Why... isn't it attacking us...?"

To everyone's dismay, the second he said that, the lion instantly began rushing toward them!

"You and your big mouth!" grumbled Cyril.

"All of you, hurry and run! I'll deal with it!" Ordered Gerald as he bolted toward the lion with lightning speed.

Continuing to roar as it charged straight for Gerald, the lion then leaped, clearly trying to slam its weight down on the incoming youth!

Naturally, Gerald wasn't about to grant it that opportunity!

Sliding right under the lion, Gerald expertly struck the beast's belly with his palm, instantly stunning it and sending the oversized lion flying!

Watching as it soared quite a distance away, Gerald had already summarized that though the lion was massive, it was bogged down by its weight. With that in mind, there was no way it was ever going to be able to match Gerald's speed.

Regardless, Gerald wasn't particularly trying to end the lion's life. On the contrary, he was thinking of taming it. After all, Gerald was certainly not against the idea of having such a large lion under his control.

Moving back to the lion, the second it hit the ground, it ended up rolling a few times before finally coming to a stop. Shaking its body as it crawled back to its feet, it then turned to face Gerald, glaring and growling fiercely at him.

Though it was a beast, it wasn't stupid. It was well aware that it wasn't going to be able to take on Gerald, which was why it was refraining from rashly attacking him again.

Seeing that, Gerald then took a few steps forward before pointing at the lion and shouting, "You have two choices. The first is to come along with me and obediently allow me to be your master. If you refuse, the only other choice you have is to get killed, cooked, then eaten! Just so you know, I've never tasted lion before, and I'm quite keen on trying! Regardless, state your choice!"

Being a divine beast, the supernatural lion could naturally understand human speech. With that in mind, upon hearing Gerald's proposal, the lion appeared to calm down a bit, seemingly falling deep into thought...

After a brief moment, the lion emitted a low growl.

"Are you serious? You'd rather get eaten than be under my control? Surely you aren't stupid enough to believe that you can even come close to defeating me!" taunted Gerald as he snorted contemptuously at the lion's behavior.

Quite frankly, if he had wanted to end the lion's life, Gerald could've done so extremely easily. Giving the lion a choice to be under him was already Gerald's way of showing mercy.

Still, if the lion was going to continue being stubborn, Gerald truly saw no reason to keep it alive. He would rather just deal with it decisively.

Either way, in response, the lion simply sassily lay on its belly before turning to look to the side with a grunt, completely refusing to even look at Gerald. How arrogant!

“Aww... Did I piss off the princess?” scoffed Gerald, seeing how childishly the lion was behaving.

All of a sudden, something flew out from Gerald’s direction before landing right in front of the lion! Upon seeing it, the lion instantly whimpered as it got to its feet and lowered its head before the tiny figure...

Of course, the figure in question was none other than the small green dragon!

Now appearing to be much tamer, it was evident that the lion was feeling intimidated by the tiny dragon. To think that the aggressive beast would be this terrified of a mere baby! It was shocking to the group of five, to say the least. Who would’ve guessed that the tiny green dragon would actually be powerful enough to scare that large lion!

“That dragon must have an immensely prestigious identity! After all, it’s able to intimidate that lion despite being so tiny!” said Ray as he walked toward Gerald’s side.

Following that, they watched as the dragon let out a tiny cry before flying back to Gerald, staring at him while swaying its body. Realizing that it was trying to ask him for something, Gerald easily put two and two together.

Shaking his head, Gerald could only say in resignation, “I get it, you want a Heaven’s apple, don’t you? Fine, I’ll give one to you!”

With that, Gerald retrieved a single Heaven’s apple from his storage ring before handing it to the dragon.

However, the dragon didn’t appear to be content with only a single apple. Swaying its body even more, the dragon then continually alternated its gaze between Gerald and the lion.

Understanding that the dragon wanted him to give the lion a Heaven's apple as well, Gerald was slightly hesitant. Even so, he had come to adore the baby dragon. With that in mind, in the end, he couldn't help but hand a second apple to it.

Satisfied, the small dragon—that was holding the two apples within its jaws—then quickly flew over to the lion. After placing an apple right before the lion, the dragon then swallowed its own apple with a single gulp.

Seeing that, the lion raised a brow before alternating its gaze between Gerald and the apple in front of it. Upon confirming that nothing was amiss, the lion quickly swallowed the apple whole, seemingly worried that someone would steal the apple from it.

The second it ate the apple, the lion instantly appeared much happier. Aside from its temperament clearly becoming much gentler, the lion also began shrinking to about the same size as Gerald and the others.

Following that, the lion then walked up to Gerald before lying down and rubbing its cheek against his leg. It was evident that this was its way of showing its submission to him.

"So I could've bribed you over with just a single Heaven's apple? If I had known, I wouldn't have wasted my energy trying to fight you in the first place!" said Gerald with a chuckle seeing how differently the lion was now behaving toward him.

Still, now that the lion was obedient to him, it meant that he had a new pet to take care of. With that in mind, Gerald then took another two Heaven's apples out to feed his pets.

It was at that moment when he remembered how precious Heaven's apples were. It pained him slightly to know that he was going to lose even more apples at a faster rate now.

Gerald could only hope that the lion didn't need to eat as many Heaven's apples as the baby dragon did. If that wasn't the case, then his apple supply would surely deplete to nothing soon enough...

“If I may, was what you just fed the lion the legendary Heaven’s apple, Mr. Crawford?” asked Ray as he looked at Gerald in surprise.

Ray had heard about the legendary Heaven’s apple for a long time now, and it certainly hadn’t occurred to him that Gerald would actually possess the holy fruit. Truth be told, it made him jealous that Gerald had access to such resources.

Regardless, Gerald simply smiled in response as he replied, “Bingo!”

Now that they knew about his stash of Heaven’s apples, Gerald felt the need to share them among his companions. With that, he retrieved four more apples and handed them to Nori and the others.

“Go on, have one each! With any luck, your strength could improve after ingesting them!” added Gerald.

Since the four of them were now good friends of his and they were even willing to follow him in his search for the Scintillating Gem, Gerald felt that it was only right for them to be rewarded with the Heaven’s apples.

Upon seeing Gerald’s generosity, the delighted four quickly took an apple each and began munching down on them.

After consuming them, the group of four instantly made breakthroughs in their strength!

Zelig finally managed to enter the Sage Realm while Nori was able to enter the Second-soul-rank of the Sage realm. Cyril himself landed in the Fourth-soul-rank of the Sage realm while Ray entered the Sage realm’s Eight-soul-rank...Regardless, after the lion was tamed, the rest of the night was rather quiet and uneventful. With that in mind, Gerald and the four others were well-rested by the time morning came.

Since the South Wastelands wasn't exactly an area one could call safe, the group of five decided to set off as early as possible. Naturally, Gerald made sure to open the map first to find out where they were headed next before actually starting their journey.

Shortly after, he declared that they were headed to Dragonblood City next. With any luck, they'd be able to find the gem there...

There were many rumors surrounding the ancient Dragonblood City, the most famous one being about the existence of an ancient Blood Dragon within the city's grounds. Within said dragon, was supposedly an object known as the Dragonblood Ball, and whoever managed to obtain the item was said to be able to gain the powers of the Blood Dragon.

While the tale was certainly compelling, Gerald wasn't going there in search of the Dragonblood Ball. He was strictly going after the Scintillating Gem, which was why he showed little interest in obtaining the Dragonblood Ball.

Either way, Gerald and his group of friends finally arrived at Dragonblood City after walking the entire morning.

However, just as they were entering the city's grounds, the group of five watched as several aggressive-looking people began riding their horses past the city's gates! Had it not been for their quick reactions, they'd surely have ended up getting trampled by those horses!

Staring at the riders, each of them seemed to have immensely murderous auras which only served to amplify how demonic those people were. While terrifying, it certainly set up the premise that they weren't ordinary people who could be trifled with.

Regardless, the fact that they had just barely avoided getting hurt prompted Zelig to scowl, "Who the hell were those brutes?!"

Upon hearing that question, Ray instantly replied, "They're from the Hulkerioic Union!"

As everyone turned to look at Ray—unsure how he even knew about such a group—Gerald couldn't help but ask, "The Hulkerioic Union...?"

Understanding that Gerald and the others wouldn't know about the Hulkerioic Union since they were new to the Leicom Continent, Ray then explained, "They're a powerful force within Dragonblood City..."

"...I see. Call it a gut feeling, but I feel like they aren't very nice people!" replied Gerald in a decisive tone.

Rei simply shrugged without saying another word, his silence a clear sign that what Gerald had stated was right.

True enough, the Hulkerioic Union was infamous for doing all kinds of outrageous and lawbreaking activities within Dragonblood City. The fact that the force was so strong only served to make its members more violent during their rampant acts of savagery.

With that in mind, locals of the city knew that it was best to just stay away from them. After all, offending them would only bring unnecessary trouble to themselves...

Either way, the group then continued strolling around Dragonblood City. The city, for one, was vastly different compared to the area around Leicom Academy...

As they were walking on, the group suddenly heard a woman screaming!

After exchanging glances with each other, all five of them then hurried over to the source of the sound...

By the time they got there, they witnessed four men dragging a young woman into an alleyway! Some of them had even begun tearing her clothes off! To think that such heinous activities would occur, even in broad daylight!

During times like these, someone needed to play the role of a white knight. Thankfully enough, Gerald was best at doing that.

With that, the group immediately charged into the alleyway together...

By the time they got to the mouth of the alley, the group was just in time to see the four men shredding the woman's clothes to bits! What savages!

Witnessing that, everyone was instantly infuriated!

Gerald hated such people with a passion, and he couldn't help but point at the assailants before roaring, "Cease that at once!"

Upon hearing Gerald's shouts, the men simply raised their brows as they turned to glare at the youth.

"Scram, you meddlesome brat! This doesn't concern you!" scowled one of the men.

"You better do as he says or I'll end you with a single slice!" growled another as he unsheathed his long sword to scare Gerald and his party members away.

"You b*stards are doing such heinous crimes against this woman in broad daylight! It'd be a sin to not take care of scum like you!" retorted Gerald, his expression contorted by his fury.

"What's that? I don't think you know who you're dealing with, kid! We're from the Hulkerioic Union, you know?! Offend us anymore and you won't be leaving this city alive!" scoffed the man wielding the sword.

Sneering in response, Gerald simply rebuked, "Who you are doesn't matter to me! I'm only going to

warn you once so listen up! If you know what's best for you, release that woman! Otherwise, don't blame me for your deaths!"

Seeing how unafraid and daring Gerald was, the four assailants were greatly infuriated. To think that this young man would actually dare to threaten them! He wasn't even intimidated by the fact that they were part of the Hulkerioic Union!

"D*mn this rude kid! Fine, if you want to die so much, be our guest!" roared another man from that group as the other three drew their long swords as well!

As the group of four charged straight for Gerald's group, Gerald calmly turned to face his own party before instructing, "Don't move a muscle. I'm dealing with them personally!"

His party naturally didn't have any objections to that. After all, they each knew how strong he was. The opposing party was going to be a piece of cake for him.

Following that, Nori and the others were able to catch a momentary glimpse of how frigid Gerald's gaze became as he turned back to face the incoming attackers.

Not even making a move until they were inches away from him, Gerald simply waited patiently for them to swing their swords... But when their blades came down, Gerald was no longer before them!

Utterly shocked by that, they were just about to start looking for him when Gerald suddenly reappeared behind them! However, this time, Gerald already had his aurablade drawn!

With a swift swipe, there was momentary silence... and the next thing everyone knew, blood was already gushing out of the four assailants' exposed necks!

With a single move, Gerald had decapitated all four of them with barely any effort needed. Since Gerald had already entered the Avatar Realm, there was simply too large a gap between their strength levels...

Regardless, now that the scum was dealt with, Gerald walked over to the young woman before helping her up. Retrieving a coat from his storage ring, he then placed it on her.

Now feeling much warmer and pleased with how considerate Gerald was being, the woman was compelled to declare, “Thank you, my benefactor...! I... I don’t have much to offer, but I’m willing to follow you till the ends of the earth!”

Upon hearing that she was willing to be under him, Gerald simply revealed a gentle smile before replying, “There’s no need for all that. If you really wish to thank me, then be more careful from now on. Also, take these gold coins. Make sure you leave this place safely with them!”

After saying that, Gerald then took a handful of gold coins from his storage ring before handing them to the woman. Once that was said, Gerald and the others then turned to leave...

Staring as they slowly walked off in the distance, it was quite a while later before the woman clutched the gold coins in her hands before leaving as well.

Fast forward to evening, Gerald and the others had managed to find a suitable hotel to stay the night in.

Since all five of them were going to share a room tonight, everyone began relaxing once they were done unpacking.

After a short while, Ray—who was sitting on one of the beds by this point—couldn’t help but say, “...Honestly, Mr. Crawford, I think we should leave Dragonblood City as soon as possible. After all, the Hulkerioic Union is definitely coming after our heads after what we’ve done!”

Since the Hulkerioic Union was so powerful in Dragonblood City, it was only natural that they would quickly realize that four of their disciples had been slaughtered, and it was exactly because of that that Ray was so worried.

Understanding that it would be disadvantageous for them to linger too long within enemy territory, Gerald then nodded as he replied, "I see your point. We'll just stay here for the night and leave the city early tomorrow morning then!"

Gerald himself didn't want to waste too much time and energy on the Hulkerioic Union. After all, getting entangled with that group would certainly delay his important mission. With that in mind, the sooner they left this place, the better their chances of avoiding trouble.

At that moment, the shattering of glass could be heard within the Hulkerioic Union's lair...

The sound had stemmed from a now shattered teacup that had been thrown to the ground by Tiger Layfield, the master of the Hulkerioic Union.

Glaring at the porcelain shards lying atop the spilled tea, Tiger gritted his teeth before ferally roaring, "How dare they kill four disciples of my union! I'm not letting them off if it's the last thing I do!"

"From what we've gathered, the person in charge of killing our men is rather young! He also has four companions with him! If my sources are correct, then they should still be in Dragonblood City!" reported a scarfed man who went by Xuio Curtice as he looked at Tiger. He was the second master of the Hulkerioic Union.

Upon hearing that, Tiger then growled, "I see! Send our men out immediately to search every corner of Dragonblood City! I want the culprits brought back to me, dead or alive! Nobody messes with the Hulkerioic Union and gets away with it!"

None in the city had ever dared to piss off those from the Hulkerioic Union. Now that four of the union's disciples had been murdered, it definitely felt like a direct challenge of authority, at least to Tiger. It certainly explained why he was so angered.

Whatever the case was, Xuio found no issue with Tiger's command. He knew better than to further piss

off the already furious Tiger. With that in mind, he then respectfully excused himself before leaving the hall. The night was definitely going to be a chaotic one...

After gathering several of the union's men, Xuio led all of them around Dragonblood City. Riding atop horses to hasten their hunt, the men searched every household from top to bottom, with or without permission from the residents living there.

With every corner of the city brightly lit, the locals weren't the only ones affected by the chaos. Outsiders of the city, in particular, were mercilessly interrogated and mistreated by those from the Hulkerioic Union. They were going to find Gerald and his party no matter what!

Due to all the hullabaloo outside, Gerald and the others—who were already asleep in their room by this point—were naturally awoken.

Peeking out the window, Ray was immediately greeted by the sight of a group of people thoroughly inspecting the area.

Noticing how pale Ray had gone, Gerald was prompted to ask, "What's wrong?"

"I-it's the people of the Hulkerioic Union...! They're most probably here for you!" replied Ray as he turned to face Gerald.

"H-huh...? Then... What should we do now...?" Upon seeing how worried Nori was when she asked that question, Gerald couldn't help but frown. To think that those from the Hulkerioic Union would be this quick to act.

After a brief pause, Gerald then obeyed, "...Pack up. We're heading up to the roof for now!"

Upon hearing that, the others quickly did as they were instructed. Shortly after, all five of them then leaped onto the roof from the hotel's window. The plan now was to lie down there and observe how the

situation played out...

It was barely even seconds after they had gotten onto the roof when Xuio and his men began barging into the hotel.

After interrogating the hotel's owner, Xuio learned that the ones they were hunting for were here. With that, Xuio instantly ordered the hotel owner to lead them to Gerald's room.

Upon arriving at the door, Xuio kicked it open with a loud 'bang' before instructing his men to rush in!

However, they quickly realized that the room was deserted!

Raising a brow, Xuio then glared at the hotel owner before growling, "Where are they? You said they were staying the night here, didn't you?"

"I-I have no idea! The five of them really are staying in this room...! I assure you that none of them left through the front door either, Mr. Curtice! Please, believe me!" whimpered the hotel owner as he looked fearfully at Xuio.

Seeing how terrified the hotel owner was, Xuio was pretty sure that he wouldn't dare lie to him. Noticing the open window, he then looked out before shouting, "...They must have escaped through the window! We must pursue them immediately!"

With that, Xuio and his men rushed out and quickly rode their horses away from the hotel.

Unfortunately for them, Gerald and his party had never left the hotel. They were on the roof this entire time!

After making sure that Xuio and his men had left, Gerald and the others then came down from the roof

and re-entered their room through the window.

The second they got inside, they saw the hotel owner standing there in a daze.

Surprised to see the hotel owner in such a terrified state, Gerald was instantly prompted to walk over to him.

However, the second the hotel owner saw him closing in, he quickly took a few steps back before running over to a corner and curling up before whimpering, "P-please sir...! Please don't kill me! I don't know anything!"

"...Kill? Boss, I'm thinking of no such thing! I was just walking toward you to tell you not to tell anyone else that we're still here! Also, take this. Consider it to be extra compensation!" replied Gerald as he took out a handful of gold coins before handing them to the hotel owner.

As the saying went, the most dangerous places were usually also the safest, and that saying definitely applied now. Since Xuio had already raided the place, he and his men definitely didn't have any reason to return. With that in mind, Gerald and his party could continue hiding here, at least for the moment.

Regardless, after realizing that Gerald wasn't after his life, the hotel owner gladly agreed with his wish. Seeing that Gerald was even handing him such a large sum of money, that pretty much sealed the deal that he wasn't going to be making things difficult for Gerald any time soon.

After the hotel owner left, Gerald and his party then remained hiding there for an entire day.

It was only after the upheaval died down on the second day when the group of five dared to leave the hotel...

The second they did, however, they were instantly greeted by a female voice calling out, "My benefactor!"

Turning to face the source of the voice, the group realized that it was the woman Gerald had saved the other day!

“Why are you still in the city?” asked Gerald with a slightly raised brow.

“Putting that aside, I know you’re in trouble, benefactor! With that in mind, please come with me! I’ll lead you to a safe place where they definitely won’t be able to find you!” replied the woman with a serious expression on her face.

Exchanging glances with each other, all of them appeared to unanimously believe in her. With that in mind, the party of five then began following her lead...

After walking for quite a while, the party suddenly heard someone call out, “Hmm? If it isn’t Miss Zorn!”

Upon hearing that, all six of them stopped in their tracks before turning to look at who had said that...

“...Oh, it’s you. To what do I owe this pleasure, young master of the Wroe family?” replied the woman with a snort.

Just from her reply alone, it was evident that she didn’t have a good impression of the youth. Gerald and the others didn’t have a hard time imagining why. After all, a single glance was all it took for them to register that he was a hedonistic child who had rich parents.

The youth went by Quaan Wroe, and just as the woman had said, he was the young master of the Wroe family. The Wroes themselves were famous for their strength, particularly within Dragonblood City.

From what Gerald could see, Quaan had already entered the Third-soul-rank within the Sage Realm, which definitely proved that the Wroe family’s strength was no exaggeration.

“Oh, don’t be so cold, Miss Zorn! Regardless, I heard that your elder sister was defeated in that martial arts competition. I guess that just shows how incapable the Zorns are now! Adding that to the fact that you don’t even possess any martial arts skills, I guess it’s fair to say that you’re the most humiliating aspect of your family!” mocked Quaan, his words filled with contempt.

The woman’s true name was Meilani Zorn, and she was the second daughter in the Zorn family. As for her sister, she went by Juno, and she had gotten to the Second-soul-rank in the Sage Realm.

True to Quaan’s words, Meilani didn’t have any martial arts skills. As a result, her family never had a good impression of her, causing her sister to usually be the prioritized one between the two.

“It appears that my sister hasn’t taught you a lesson for a bit too long, seeing that you’re free enough to wait around just for the sake of mocking me!” grumbled Meilani as she glared at the cocky person.

Laughing in response, Quaan then replied, “You misunderstand me, Meilani! Why on earth would I mock you? No, I’m just here to ask who defeated your elder sister! You know, just in case I bump into them on the streets! If I do, I’ll surely do your sister justice by teaching them a good lesson!”

Seeing how shamelessly Quaan was bragging, Gerald couldn’t help but chuckle in his mind. How naïve and amusing for a person who’s only in the Third-soul-rank of the Sage Realm to be this cocky!

“...Hmm? You aren’t pulling my leg are you?” asked Meilani, her mood switching from grumpy to curious in a flash. If one paid close enough attention, they would be able to see the gears in Meilani’s head grinding...

“But of course! I’m a man of my word, after all! If I ever catch that person, they’re as good as dead!” replied Quaan confidently as he patted his chest before Meilani.

Upon hearing that, Meilani turned to look at Gerald for a moment... before finally saying, “Well, if you say so! The person you’re looking for is right here!”

Watching as Meilani then pointed at Gerald, Quaan found himself momentarily stupefied. To think that a person as unnoteworthy-looking as Gerald would be the culprit!

Gerald himself was equally as stunned as he thought, 'Who the hell even is her sister? Don't use me as an excuse!'

"You're kidding, right, Meilani? As if this scrawny guy could ever beat your sister!" replied Quaan as he briefly looked at Gerald rather disdainfully before turning back to look at Meilani.

"As if I'd joke about such a serious matter! Though, seeing how hesitant you're being, I wonder if you're just afraid..." taunted Meilani.

Being as naïve as he was, Quaan instantly took the bait. Grumbling angrily, Quaan then pointed at Gerald before yelling, "You and me, one-on-one! Do you accept my challenge?!"

"You sure?" asked Gerald in a casual tone.

"Of course, I am! Unless you're too chicken to accept!" scoffed Quaan.

"Oh no, I'm just worried that you'll lose a bit too terribly for your taste!" replied Gerald calmly in a confident tone.

Still, to think that Meilani would actually give him trouble...The way things were going, it was clear that he wouldn't be able to easily walk out of this anyway.

Before Gerald could say anything else, Meilani secretly winked at him before whispering, "Please teach him a lesson for me, Gerald! This guy just loves pestering me!"

“Allow me to remind you that I’m not your hired thug!”

“I’m sorry if I made it sound that way, but please, please help me out...! Don’t worry, if anything happens, I’ll be sure to take responsibility for it!” pleaded Meilani as she made puppy dog eyes.

Hearing that, Gerald could only sigh as he agreed to her request.

“Hey kid, you must’ve cheated to defeat Juno, right? You couldn’t possibly have taken her down any way else! With that in mind, I hope you’re ready to receive a good pummelling!” scoffed Quaan as he pointed confidently at Gerald.

Before Gerald could even reply, Quaan began dashing toward him!

However, Quaan was so pitifully slow that Gerald couldn’t help but feel sorry for him. Compared to Meilani—who didn’t even have any martial arts training—, Quaan was probably half as slow as she was!

Now seeing the underwhelming extent of Quaan’s strength, Gerald felt that it was disdainful to even make a move on the cocky youth. Even so, since things had come to this, he still needed to defeat Quaan in the end.

While he did feel slightly sorry for the weakling, Gerald wasn’t against the idea of having a bit of fun with Quaan first before defeating him.

Regardless, Gerald easily dodged Quaan’s punch just by moving slightly to the side.

Seeing that his attack missed, Quaan instantly responded with a clawing attack!

Naturally, Gerald was quick to respond, and he raised his arm to block Quaan’s attack!

When Quaan's attack managed to shred Gerald's sleeve to pieces, Gerald found himself slightly surprised. Upon closer inspection, the attack appeared to be the Dragon Claw... So even someone like Quaan was able to use that technique!

"Not bad... So, you've mastered the Dragon Claw attack! Now things are getting slightly interesting!" said Gerald as he took a step back while looking at Quaan with a devilish smile.

"So, this is the extent of your power, kid? Hah! I really have no clue how you even managed to take Juno down!" scoffed Quaan in return, still brimming with confidence. After all, to him, Gerald had no way of fighting back at all.

Meilani, on the other hand, knew exactly what was going on in Gerald's mind. Standing at the side, she could easily tell that Gerald was simply toying around with Quaan. With how strong Gerald was, using actual skills on Quaan would only be a waste of energy!

"Now, now, you haven't even defeated me yet! Till you do, don't you think it's a bit shameless to be so overconfident?" retorted Gerald, not even finding the need to be angry toward such a weak person.

"Hah! Fine, then! Here comes your finishing blow!" declared Quaan before leaping and aiming a kick right for Gerald!

In response, however, the calm Gerald simply kicked the incoming youth right in the side!

Unable to even block the attack in time, Quaan found himself flying several dozen feet away!

Hitting the ground extremely forcefully, Quaan couldn't even find the energy to crawl back up. That just showed how truly powerful Gerald's simple kick had been...

The delighted Meilani couldn't help but smile when she saw Quaan getting destroyed like that. To her, he was finally reaping what he sowed, and he deserved all that had just happened to him.

Regardless, what happened to him next was of little concern to her. With that in mind, Meilani then led Gerald and the others away from there...

It wasn't too long after they left when Quaan—who had fainted from all the pain—slowly regained his consciousness...

Upon crawling to his knees, he instantly placed his hand against his chest when he felt an acute pain there! It appeared that he had suffered some internal injuries...

Looking around to see where Meilani and Gerald were, he quickly realized that they were long gone. With another surge of excruciating pain, Quaan was unable to remain conscious and ended up flopping to the ground again, completely devoid of energy...

Shortly after, Gerald and his party arrived at the Zorn family's residence under Meilani's guide.

"I can't believe how mean you were earlier, Gerald! You could've clearly taken him out much earlier but you made sure to humiliate him first!" teased Meilani.

"Well excuse me, princess... You're the one who put me in that position in the first place! I can't just end a duel within seconds! Also, while we're on the topic, don't use me to get things done ever again..." grumbled Gerald slightly awkwardly.

He particularly made sure to make this clear so that Meilani wouldn't keep doing the same thing. After all, if she continued using him like she just had, then Gerald was fairly certain that it wouldn't take her long to land him in even more troublesome affairs.

Aside from the Hulkeroic Union, he now had Quaan as an enemy as well. Gerald was simply facing

dilemma after dilemma...

Either way, after hearing that, Meilani quickly nodded before replying, "Got it! Don't worry, I just wanted to get rid of him earlier! I promise that there won't be another time!"

Honestly, she was already very pleased that Gerald was willing to help her teach Quaan a lesson in the first place.

Regardless, while Gerald and the others were now at the Zorn family's residence, Quaan himself was soon found by those under him. After being carried to the Wroe family's residence, it was quickly made evident that Quaan's martial arts skills had been sealed. With even his motor functions in shambles, Quaan was unable to move on his own anymore...

Fast forward to a few days later, three elderly men donning long robes could be seen standing around Quaan's bed in the dead of night...

Quaan had remained lying in bed ever since his duel with Gerald ruined him. The fact that he needed help from his servants to do even the most basic of daily activities such as drinking, eating, and even using the washroom, brought immense humiliation to him.

Even so, Quid Wroe wasn't hesitant in the slightest to spend massive amounts of money to cure his son. With that in mind, he had paid no small sum to hire the three old men from Glenpawa Mountain—who each had extraordinary martial arts skills—to hopefully help his son recover...

Either way, after sitting by Quaan's side for a while to check his condition, one of the elderly men eventually said, "...Hmm... Young Master Wroe's condition is really serious!"

"How serious are we talking about here, Mr. Quarles?" asked Quid in a worried tone.

As Quid had stated, the old person went by Lidorn Quarles, and he had already entered the Third rank in

the Avatar Realm.

“Extremely, Master Wroe. After all, from the injuries sustained alone, I can already tell that the person who did this to him was immensely strong. The assailant’s attack was both fierce and decisive, and with how much damage that precise strike did, I’m afraid it won’t be easy to cure the young master,” replied Lidorn as he shook his head and sighed in resignation.

Upon hearing that, Quid couldn’t help but frown as anger surged through him.

Well, this was just perfect! Now that he knew that the assailant was immensely powerful, Quid definitely wasn’t going to be able to take revenge on his son’s behalf!

It certainly didn’t help that the Zorns were the only true rivals of the Wroe family in Dragonblood City. With his son’s condition like this, falling out with the Zorns was the last thing he wanted at the moment.

However, Quid had paid close attention to Lidorn’s choice of words earlier. Hoping for a silver lining, he then asked, “...You said curing him would be difficult... However, that means he can still be cured, correct?”

Hearing that, Lidorn turned to look at Quid before nodding slowly...“Indeed. While curing a person whose martial arts skills have been annihilated has been immensely difficult from the dawn of time, there is a way to get it done... Your son can definitely be healed if we manage to obtain an ancient secret medicine called the Guddegella! Once the young master ingests it, he’ll surely be able to regain the ability to use martial arts!” explained Quid.

“And how do I obtain this medicine?” asked Quid eagerly.

Of course, obtaining such precious medicine was never going to be easy.

“Well, according to the legend, the Guddegella can be found at the crisscross of vast rivers and streams

in the Treholm Highlands. With that said, it's not easily obtained. As proof of that, the Guddegella has only been successfully acquired twice throughout history!" replied Lidorn.

While that was certainly disheartening to hear, it was better than having no cure at all. At the very least there existed a chance for his son to function normally again...

"Don't you worry, Mr. Quarles! I'll definitely obtain the Guddegella one way or another!" declared Quid as he confidently looked at Lidorn.

"Very well, then. Speaking of which, I wonder if the person who wounded Young Master Wroe is still within Dragoblood City... Since we're now here anyway, we may as well seek revenge on behalf of your son!" said Lidorn.

Since Quid had paid them so well, the least they could do was seek revenge for his son's behalf.

Naturally, Quid was instantly overjoyed to hear that. Gerald and his party were definitely going to meet a terrible end now that these three were stepping in!

Even so, Quid was prompted to say, "...Are you sure, Mr. Quarles? You said it yourself that the kid was extremely strong!"

Laughing in response, Lidorn then confidently replied, "Worry not. With our powers combined, the three of us will definitely be able to take him on! Now, without further ado, we'll be on our way to seek revenge on behalf of Young Master Wroe! Till we meet again!"

Before Quid could even reply, all three of the elderly men had already leaped into the shadows, their destination the Wroe family's residence...

Meanwhile, Gerald and Meilani were sitting in the back garden of the Wroe family's home. Meilani herself seemed particularly happy to be able to sit and talk idly like this with Gerald. After all, she had

started developing feelings for him ever since he saved her...

Regardless, Gerald and his party members had remained safe with the Zorn family's residence this entire time since Meilani's family was quite influential and powerful within Dragonblood City. With that in mind, nobody dared to behave rashly toward them in fear of offending the Zorns.

Either way, as Meilani continued talking happily, Gerald's keen senses suddenly detected a sword being thrown toward them!

"Careful!" shouted Gerald as he immediately tugged Meilani toward him, allowing both of them to dodge the incoming sword!

Staring at the sword that was now lodged in the ground, both of them instantly grew vigilant.

As they were scanning the area, the duo witnessed as three people donning grey robes leaped over the fence before landing right in front of Gerald and Meilani.

Glaring at Gerald, Lidorn shouted, "I'm finishing you off today, kid!"

"Who even are you? I don't remember bearing any grudges against you! What's your purpose of killing me?" retorted Gerald as he frowned.

"Cut the cr*p and just give up your life already!" scoffed Lidorn as he snorted, unwilling to reveal his identity... "Go seek shelter, Meilani! I'll deal with them!" instructed Gerald.

Understanding that staying here would only give Gerald more trouble—since she didn't know any martial arts—, Meilani simply nodded before running off. At the very least, she could look for help...

Once he was sure that she had left, Gerald turned to look at the three elderly men again... and with that,

their battle commenced!

Facing an onslaught of attacks from three people who had already entered the Avatar Realm, it quickly became increasingly strenuous for Gerald to deal with them. With that in mind, Gerald could only stall for time and look for gaps for him to strike...

Eventually, however, three on one was a little too much for him, and Lidorn finally managed to land a blow on Gerald!

Upon impact, Gerald was instantly flung backward as blood spurted out of his mouth! Landing hard on the ground, Gerald was well aware that Lidorn's strike had undoubtedly caused massive damage to his inner breathing shield.

Staring at Gerald's pathetic state, Lidorn then sneered, "To think that you've managed to enter the Avatar Realm at your age, kid! While you truly are a martial arts genius, you've unfortunately offended someone you shouldn't have! With that said, it's a pity, but your life ends today!"

Lidorn really meant it when he said that. After all, few were able to enter the Avatar Realm at Gerald's age. Those who made it to this realm were usually elders who had trained hard for many, many years... What a pity that this martial arts genius had to go...

Shaking the thought off, Lidorn then raised his sword, aiming it at Gerald...

Upon seeing that, Gerald knew he was done for. With that, he simply closed his eyes tight, awaiting death.

However, just seconds before the sword pierced his heart, Gerald suddenly remembered the silk bag that Sumeru had given him. With that, he immediately grabbed the silk bag and opened it!

Immediately after Gerald did that, the bag released a golden light that lit up the entire back garden! Due

to how blinding it was, Lidorn and the other two elders were forced to back away a little since they couldn't see a thing.

The next thing everyone knew, a figure could be seen leaping off the roof... and landing right between the two parties.

Before Lidorn could even react, he was greeted by a swift force palm from the figure!

Watching as Lidorn flew backward, Gerald was overjoyed when he realized that the person before him was none other than Sumeru!

"M-master...!" called out Gerald in a weak voice before finally blacking out.

Seeing the terrible state his beloved student was in, Sumeru was instantly infuriated!

Leaping back to his initial position, Lidorn then glared at Sumeru before scoffing, "I'm assuming you're that kid's master! Since you've decided to step in, we'll just get rid of you first!"

With that said, all three of them began charging toward Sumeru!

Sumeru, however, didn't budge from his spot. Instead, he simply stood there extremely calmly as he unsheathed his sword...

And with an expressionless face, he drew the rest of his blade out in a flash of an eye. Sumeru's slash was so fast that Lidorn and his men didn't even know what he had done...

Until they felt blood trickling down their necks.

Eyes widened as they stared at Sumeru, all three of them held onto their necks before finally falling lifelessly to the ground...

Lying in the slowly growing puddle of blood, none of them could have anticipated that Sumeru would be this strong...! To think that it had barely taken him a second to finish them off!

Sumeru himself simply growled at the three corpses. They never had a chance against him...It was around then when Meilani returned to the scene together with Nori and the others.

Upon realizing that Gerald's master had killed off the three elderly assailants, Meilani was instantly shocked. To think that he was this powerful... Having such a strong master, it now made sense why Gerald was able to be as strong as he currently was!

Quickly snapping out of it and returning her attention to Gerald, Meilani then rushed over to the injured youth while calling out, "Gerald...!"

Call as she might, Gerald was already unconscious...

With the three old men dealt with, Sumeru then sheathed his sword before heading over to Gerald's side and inspecting his wounds.

"...His inner breathing structure is in a mess... I need to treat him immediately!" declared Sumeru after checking for Gerald's pulse through the youth's wrist.

Following that, he lifted Gerald in his arms and ran—under Meilani's guidance—all the way to Gerald's room.

After placing the unconscious Gerald on his bed, Sumeru then yelled, "All of you, get out! Don't bother me as I cure his wounds!"

Though Meilani wanted to stay, in the end, she quickly gave up trying to protest.

As Meilani closed the door behind her and leaned against it—planning to wait there till Gerald’s master was done curing him—, she watched as her father rushed toward her.

“What on earth happened, Meilani?” asked Yeurquin Zorn in an anxious tone.

“Three powerful people suddenly attacked us, declaring that they wanted to kill Gerald! While he’s terribly injured, he’s thankfully still alive!” explained Meilani while looking at her father.

“What? How preposterous! To think that someone would dare hurt our family’s benefactor, and within our residence no less! I must get to the bottom of this!” growled Yeurquin.

While he was greatly angered, the priority now was still to ensure that Gerald’s injuries were successfully cured. Meilani was even more anxious about that than he was, and she truly hoped that Gerald would turn out fine in the end...

“...Speaking of which, where is Gerald? And what’s his condition?” asked Yeurquin as he looked at his daughter.

“...Well... Gerald’s master is currently treating his injuries...” mumbled Meilani before dragging her father a little further from the door.

Raising a slight brow, Yeurquin couldn’t help but ask, “...What’s wrong, Meilani? Why so secretive?”

“W-well, you see, Gerald’s master is extremely powerful! From how clean the cuts were on the corpses, it’s evident that he killed all three of those mighty assailants with a single slash!” whispered Meilani as she looked at her father in her bewilderment.

“...And? Is that why you’re being so secretive? My child, you, of all people, should know how strong Gerald is. With that in mind, his master must definitely be stronger than him!” replied Yeurquin in a calm tone.

Yeurquin had caught a glimpse of Sumeru earlier—as the dean was rushing to bring Gerald to his room—, and even from that moment, he could already tell that Sumeru was an extraordinary person.

Now that he realized that Sumeru was Gerald’s master, Yeurquin was able to confirm that assumption. To him, Sumeru was the kind of person who wouldn’t take action if others could do so. After all, a single move from Sumeru would certainly amaze the world...

His train of thought was cut short when he heard Meilani ask, “Say, do you think Gerald’s master would take me as his disciple as well, dad...?”

Raising a brow, Yeurquin then retorted, “As if he’d do that, Meilani! You can’t just ask him to be your master! Besides, he already has Gerald as his disciple. What makes you so sure he’ll even want another?”

Hearing that, Meilani instantly zipped her mouth. While she already knew that being Sumeru’s disciple was near-impossible, a girl could dream...

At that moment, both of them heard a door creaking open... Turning to face the sound, they watched as Sumeru walked out from Gerald’s room...Seeing that, both Yeurquin and Meilani hurried over to him.

“How’s Gerald’s condition, master?” asked Yeurquin in a concerned tone.

“He’s fine for now, though he’ll need to recuperate properly for the next few days. Until then, do take care of him. While I’d love to stay, I must leave now to deal with some affairs,” replied Sumeru before leaping off and disappearing almost instantaneously.

While Sumeru hadn't specified what exactly he needed to do, Yeurquin and his daughter had a hunch that he was going to avenge Gerald.

Whatever the case was, both of them then quickly headed into the room to check on Gerald.

Sitting by his bed, they couldn't help but worry when they saw how pale and feeble he now looked. After all, he had suffered from terrible internal injuries.

Thankfully, Sumeru had successfully repaired Gerald's internal breathing shield, and the only minor drawback to this incident was the fact that he needed a few days to properly recuperate...

A little while later in the Wroe family's residence, Quid could be seen sitting anxiously as he awaited the three elders' return.

Shortly after, one of the family's butlers came bursting in while nervously shouting, "T-this is bad, master! Something's terribly wrong!"

"What is it? Calm yourself!" retorted Quid as he glared at the flustered butler.

"M-master... Mr. Quarles and the other two elders... they... they're dead...!" stuttered the quivering butler.

"What?!" yelled Quid, momentarily stupefied.

The three old men were incredibly strong! How had Gerald managed to take on them...?!

Now starting to panic, Quid—who was still in disbelief—was prompted to ask, "...Are you really sure of

that?"

"I swear on my life, master! Since you told me to keep an eye on their progress, I was able to witness all three of them getting decapitated in a single slash!" replied the terrified butler as he recalled what he had earlier witnessed.

Upon hearing that, Quid's terror instantly began sinking in. If the murderer was on Gerald's side... then he'd surely find out soon enough that Quid was the one orchestrating all this!

His train of thought was cut short when an explosive sound was suddenly heard!

Dodging just in time to avoid getting squashed by a flying door, both Quid and his butler could only stare wide-eyed at the figure that had just appeared before them...

Snapping out of it, Quid instantly attempted to call for his guards... only to realize that he couldn't make a sound!

Placing his hand on his neck, both Quid and the butler quickly realized that a stream of blood was already flowing down their necks...

And just like that, the two men flopped onto an encroaching puddle of their own blood, dead.

Now that both of them were dealt with, the figure made another leap before vanishing without a trace...

By the time the other Wroes got to the scene, they were instantly greeted by the sight of Quid and the butler's corpses lying in a pool of their own blood... Naturally, this caused a major uproar among the Wroe family members, and the lady of the Wroe family even blacked out.

For the Wroes, it was a night of chaos and great confusion...When Gerald awoke the next day, he was

greeted by the sight of his master—who had his eyes closed—sitting by his bed.

Attempting to get up, Gerald immediately realized that his entire body was aching... He couldn't even sit up!

At that moment, Sumeru suddenly opened his eyes. Realizing that Gerald had regained consciousness, he instantly smiled as he said, "Gerald! You're awake!"

"Master, I..."

"Don't worry, you'll be fine. You're just suffering from some internal injuries at the moment. You'll be as fit as a fiddle soon enough as long as you recuperate properly for the next few days!" replied Sumeru before Gerald was even able to finish his question.

Hearing that, Gerald fell silent...

Shortly after, knocking could be heard from his room's door.

Walking over to open it, Sumeru saw that it was Meilani who was here to bring Gerald his breakfast.

After entering the room, Meilani placed Gerald's breakfast on his table before asking in a concerned tone, "How do you feel, Gerald? Any discomfort anywhere...?"

Smiling subtly in response, Gerald then shook his head before weakly replying, "I'm fine... I just need to recuperate for a while..."

Seeing that Meilani was going to care for Gerald, Sumeru then left the room.

Upon seeing that, Meilani then took the chance to whisper, "Say, I have some good news, Gerald! The master of the Wroe family was killed in his own house yesterday!"

Appearing momentarily stunned, it was made evident that Gerald hadn't expected such an event to happen out of the blue.

A short pause later, Meilani then added, "...Also, you may not know this, but your master went off someplace last night to, 'attend to something', as he said..."

Raising a slight brow as he pondered on Meilani's obvious hint, Gerald stared at her for a while before replying, "You... think my master did it...?"

"If you need further proof, I went over to look at Quid's corpse today... The gash in his neck was similar to the ones on the three elders your master killed yesterday!" explained Meilani.

Upon hearing that, Gerald began thinking, 'If what she's saying is true, then I guess master has already avenged me...'

"...Well, either way, there's no need to worry too much about it, Gerald. After all, the Wroes don't seem to know that your master was behind all this. What more, since the Wroes attacked you yesterday, their family probably won't be too keen on making this event public," said Meilani.

After suffering two major losses for attempting to outwit their enemy, the Wroes were definitely going to play it much safer after this...

Not long after, Nori and the rest of Gerald's party entered the room as well.

Sitting by the foot of his bed, the concerned Nori couldn't help but ask, "How are you feeling, Gerald...?"

After seeing how terrible Gerald's state was the day before, Nori had been frightened half to death, fearing that Gerald wasn't going to be able to recover.

"Don't worry, I'm feeling much better now!" replied Gerald with a smile.

"That's great to hear, Mr. Crawford! Do rest up in the next few days so that we can resume our journey once you're fully cured!" said Ray.

In his current state, there was no way that they were going to be able to continue their journey at their initial rate. With that in mind, the best course of action now was to wait for Gerald to get better.

Nodding in response, Gerald went silent for a while before eventually turning to look at his party and asking, "Speaking of which, where did master go?"

"Ah, the dean's already left! He told us to take good care of you, and he also instructed us to tell you that he's resolved everything for you. With the Wroe family currently in disarray, it won't be long before they ruin themselves!" explained Ray.

Upon hearing that, Gerald could rest assured. Despite the good news, however, there was a nagging feeling within him...

The fact that he was still beaten up that terribly the day before meant that he still wasn't powerful enough..."Either way, make sure you rest up properly in the coming days! You can leave handling anything else to us!" added Nori.

Upon hearing that, Gerald understood that he didn't really have any other choice but to obey. With that, he lay back down to recuperate...

Early in the morning a few days later, Juno—Meilani's elder sister—could be seen knocking on Gerald's door before asking, "Gerald? Are you awake...?"

After waiting for quite a while and getting no response, Juno couldn't help but raise a slight brow as she opened the door... only to find that he wasn't even inside!

'Where could he have gone? He couldn't have just left, could he?' Juno thought to herself in bewilderment.

Frowning slightly, she had an idea of where else Gerald could possibly be... With that in mind, she quickly headed to the back garden to see if he was there.

Just as she had thought, Juno was instantly greeted by the sight of Gerald and Leit Query meditating on stone benches upon arriving at the back garden. With their eyes closed, both of them appeared rather content...

Rolling her eyes, Juno couldn't help but sigh. No wonder his room was empty! The two had woken up early in the morning to train themselves!

After a slight pause, Juno then walked over to Gerald's side before whispering, "Gerald...!"

Hearing his name, Gerald then opened his eyes before smiling as he replied, "Ah, Young Lady Zorn! You're up early! Are you here to train as well?"

Momentarily disregarding Gerald's question, Juno took a peek at Leit who was sitting beside him...

Seeing that he had barely moved and there were little to no changes in his expressions, Juno could only sigh. She was well aware that Leit wasn't someone to be trifled with, and she was honestly slightly afraid that he would be angered since she had come looking for Gerald...

Regardless, when he sensed Juno's gaze on him, Leit opened an eye before getting up and leaping

straight out of the back garden...

Upon seeing that, Gerald was slightly pleased by Leit's ability to read the mood. He was sure that Leit had only left since he didn't want to disturb Gerald and Juno's moment.

Juno herself was happy that Leit got the hint. Either way, now that he was gone, Juno quickly turned her attention back on Gerald as she asked, "Why on earth did you wake up so early, Gerald?"

"I'm just used to waking up early!" replied Gerald.

Gerald had developed this habit ever since he was a child, and it had surprisingly helped him improve both his body's capabilities as well as his martial arts skills in later years.

"...I see. Anyway, if you're done meditating, follow me! I'll bring you someplace!" said Juno as she instantly grabbed Gerald's hand and began tugging him out of her home without even waiting for him to reply...

Seeing that she had her mind made up, Gerald simply allowed himself to be pulled along...

Eventually, they arrived at a bakery of sorts...

"Breakfast is going to be my treat today, Gerald! Just so you know, I come here daily because the bread they make is just way too delicious!"

Following that, she dragged him into the bakery before shouting, "Waiter! Three trays of bread, please!"

Since Juno was a regular, he naturally knew her and prioritized her order.

With that in mind, it took less than a minute for the waiter to carry three trays filled with delicious-smelling bread over to Gerald and Juno's table.

"Go on, don't be shy! Try some!" urged Juno as she pushed one of the loaves over to Gerald.

Not even waiting for him to reply, Juno then began stuffing bread into her mouth without caring about her image at all.

Juno's appetite was... astounding, to say the least.

While Gerald was full from just a single tray of bread, Juno managed to finish the bread from the remaining two trays she ordered!

"...A rather voracious appetite you have there, Lady Zorn..." muttered Gerald in a slightly surprised tone as he rested his palm against his forehead...Upon hearing that, Juno simply turned to look at Gerald before bluntly replying, "What of it? I was just born with a big appetite!"

Shaking his head, Gerald simply zipped his mouth, worried that Juno would flip the table over if he pressed on.

Regardless, the duo then headed to Dragonblood City's training court after finishing their breakfast.

In the Leicom Continent, each city had its own training court, and such places were used to host all sorts of yearly competitions. Of course, training courts were also used as formal places for those proficient in martial arts to train and battle.

Either way, by the time they got to the training court, many people were already sparring against each other.

Upon realizing Juno's presence, everyone there instantly displayed respectful expressions, even going so far as to offer Juno their sparring areas.

From that alone, it was evident that Juno still had a pretty large influence in Dragonblood City. After all, powerful people were always respected by others, regardless of gender.

Turning down their offers, Juno simply selected a secluded area before looking at Gerald and saying, "Allow me to challenge you to a duel, Gerald!"

"I accept!" replied Gerald without the slightest hesitation.

After all, he had previously promised to teach Juno some martial arts skills, and what better way to learn such skills than to brawl against each other. The more they sparred, the more rapid Juno's martial arts skills would improve.

With that in mind, both of them stood at opposite ends...

Looking at Gerald, she then asked, "Are you ready?"

"Ready as ever!" replied Gerald with a nod.

Hearing that, Juno wasted no time and instantly began charging toward Gerald! Being quite fast, it barely took a second for her fist to get inches away from Gerald's face!

While she was definitely strong, Juno was simply using the same attack she always did. With that in mind, Gerald easily avoided her hit before grabbing onto her arm and yanking it toward the ground!

Due to the sudden shift, Juno lost her balance and almost fell face first! Thankfully, Gerald quickly pulled her back up to save her the humiliation.

Whatever the case was, upon witnessing all that, everyone else at the scene instantly revealed surprised expressions.

They, of all people, knew how strong Juno was. After all, she kept challenging them in the past, and after continuously getting pummelled time and again, nobody dared to initiate challenges with her anymore. She was simply too strong for them!

When they had seen Gerald earlier, they thought that she had just pulled some poor sap to duel with her since she hadn't been able to duel anyone in a while. They certainly hadn't expected that young man to be able to defeat her that easily! It was truly a stupefying thing to witness...

Shortly after, Juno—who definitely wasn't going to admit defeat so easily—then got on her feet again before shouting, "Again!"

She was sure that she could eventually be able to at least launch more moves before getting disengaged by Gerald.

"Hold on a second, Young Lady Zorn!" yelled Gerald in return.

Raising a slight brow, Juno then asked, "What is it?"

"A suggestion...You may need to consider changing your attacking style. If you keep coming at me with the same move, I'll be able to disengage you in a single move regardless of how many times you attack me!" replied Gerald as he shared his analysis with her.

"There's... a problem with my attack style?" asked the puzzled Juno.

She had been using this attack style her entire life! Juno didn't feel like it needed changing. With that in

mind, what was Gerald's reason for suggesting that...?

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Naturally, Gerald wasn't commenting on the attack itself. While her attack style was definitely powerful, what he meant was that before attacking, she often left herself wide open to be countered. Adding that to the fact that she never changed her attack style, any opponent stronger than her could most definitely be able to see through her attack patterns in time. It explained why Gerald was able to defeat her so easily.

The only reason why she had been able to win all the previous times was because the enemies she bumped into were far weaker than her. With that in mind, they probably didn't have the chance or experience to analyze Juno's attack patterns.

Gerald, however, was much stronger than her. What more, he had been personally trained by Leit, and he even had unique opinions and analysis on martial arts skills and attack tactics.

Regardless, after hearing Juno's question, Gerald replied in a serious tone, "Think about it. From what I've seen, you tend to only focus on attacking, and more often than not, that leaves you open to getting countered! As proof of that, I was able to easily defeat you since you barely ever focus on defense!"

Upon hearing that, Juno paused for a moment. Rather than getting angry for being criticized, Juno instead admitted that that was a pretty huge flaw of hers. How had she not noticed that before?

A brief moment later, Juno then looked at Gerald before saying, "...I see! Thank you for the advice, Gerald!"

This was definitely going to help Juno greatly in the long run. No wonder she had always felt that her martial arts journey was extremely dull. As it turned out, she had been limiting herself to only a single attack style!

Either way, she now understood that she needed to focus on learning new attack styles. In doing so, she would surely be able to eventually improve both her strength and martial arts skills.

Still, she couldn't help but think that listening to the advice of wise men brought about much more favorable effects compared to her reading up techniques alone.

Whatever the case was, though her mind was set on changing her attack style, old habits died hard, and Juno was well aware that it was going to take a lot of time and effort to get out of that habit.

However, she wasn't disheartened by that fact. Instead, she simply continued to spar against Gerald, slowly trying to change her attack style.

While it made her movements slightly awkward and clunky, at the very least, she was no longer getting defeated in just a single move. By the two-hour mark, she was already able to make up to three moves before getting shut down.

Since that took quite a bit out of her, both of them decided to take a rest at the training court's sitting area.

Sweating profusely, Juno—who could see how much she had improved just from sparring against Gerald for those two hours—sincerely said, “Thank you very much for today, Gerald! If you hadn't tutored me, I wouldn't have been able to make this much progress in such a short amount of time!”

Though she said that, she understood that there was still a vast difference between their capabilities...

Either way, it wasn't long before Nori and Ray suddenly rushed into the training court. Upon seeing Gerald, the anxious Nori quickly ran toward him while saying, “G-Gerald! This is bad! Something terrible has happened...!”

Puzzled, Gerald then frowned slightly as he asked, “What's wrong?”

“W-well, Zelig and Cyril were captured by those from the Hulkeroic Union! Though we did our best to get them back, in the end, there were simply too many of them! We failed to save them!” explained

Nori.

“What?!” growled Gerald, his anger suddenly spiking. To think that they would do something like this to his friends! The Hulkerioic Union truly was getting out of hand!

“That settles it! We’re going after the Hulkerioic Union now!” After declaring that, Gerald was ready to leave together with Nori and Ray. No matter the risks, he definitely had to save both Zelig and Cyril!

Before he could leave, however, he suddenly heard Juno call out, “Wait a minute, Gerald!”

“Yes, Young Lady Zorn? If it isn’t anything important, I’d very much prefer it if you saved it for later! I need to focus on saving my friends now!” replied Gerald.

“Calm yourself, Gerald! Listen, if you weren’t already aware, the master of the Hulkerioic Union has already entered the Third rank of the Avatar Realm! With that in mind, simply charging there is no different from going on a suicide mission!” explained Juno.

Aside from Gerald who had already entered the Avatar Realm, the others—who were still in the Sage Realm—wouldn’t stand a chance against the stronger members of the Hulkerioic Union. With that in mind, Juno didn’t want them to just throw their lives away like that.

“Even if you say that, I can’t just leave them there!” replied Gerald. While he understood Juno’s point, he was adamant about saving Zelig and Cyril.

After all, both of them had selflessly agreed to go on this perilous journey with him despite not knowing much about it. Now that they had gotten into trouble, it would be inhumane of Gerald to not at least try getting them back.

“Still... How about this, I’ll send some people over to scout the situation. Once we get a clearer picture of what the Hulkerioic Union has up their sleeves, we can then formulate a plan to save them!” said Juno.

Upon hearing that, Gerald paused for a moment before eventually nodding slightly.

She was right. It was definitely going to be better for them if they got someone to scout ahead first. Her suggestion was way better than simply charging into the enemy's base anyway. Besides, those from the Hulkerioic Union were probably going to be on the lookout for them, expecting Gerald to come save his friends.

Regardless, seeing that Gerald had agreed with her plan, the group then left the training court for Juno to send some of her men to scout the Hulkerioic Union's base...

...

Meanwhile, Zelig and Cyril could be seen being tied up in the Hulkerioic Union base's hall.

Appearing superior as he sat on his high throne, Tiger—the master of the union—simply glared at the duo as Xuio and his men stood by their leader's side.

Revealing a sinister smile, Xuio then said, "These are that guy's companions, master! Now that we've captured them, that guy will surely come over to save them! It's high time we had our revenge!"

Sneering contemptuously, Tiger then growled, "Anyone who dares lay a finger on the people of the Hulkerioic Union must die! Regardless, lock both of them up in the dungeon, and have them guarded strictly! Aside from that, order everyone to remain vigilant at all times! I'm sure he'll be coming over soon enough, and once he does, he won't be leaving our base alive!"

Following that, Zelig and Cyril were quickly dragged away and locked in the base's dungeon...

"It seems that we truly are done for this time, Mr. Gabrio!" muttered Zelig with a sigh as he looked

around the dungeon.

“Don’t get too anxious just yet! I believe that Gerald cares enough for us to eventually come to our rescue!” consoled Cyril who greatly believed in Gerald. After all, Gerald was the kind of person who would never abandon his allies.

Of course, Cyril was right. Gerald and the others were currently seated at a restaurant not too far from the Hulkerioic Union’s base. Since they were seated by the window, they could keep an eye on the Hulkerioic Union’s activities while discussing their next step.

“My men have managed to gather that your friends are currently locked up in the Hulkerioic Union base’s dungeon. The dungeon itself is at the end of their base’s main hall. In other words, we’ll have to somehow make it through their main hall to even get to your two friends!” explained Juno. “While it’s great that we know all that, how on earth are we going to get past the Hulkerioic Union’s tight security? Even from here, we can already see how heavily guarded they now are! Hell, they’ve even set up patrol teams! With that in mind, we’ll definitely get caught if we head in rashly!” muttered Ray in response.

Hearing that, Gerald and the others knew that Ray was right. With how strict the Hulkerioic Union’s security currently was, it was evident that those from that union were expecting Gerald to come save the duo. It was certainly a death trap like no other...

“...Anyone have any ideas on how we should tackle this? What about you, Young Lady Zorn?” asked Gerald as he looked at Juno.

Upon hearing his question, Juno began pondering as well. While they already knew where the hostages were, saving them was going to prove extremely difficult...

“...The only thing I can think of is to lure them away from the base... Aside from that, I have no other idea how we’ll even make it into their base to save your two friends!” replied Juno.

“I see... I was thinking the same thing. After all, simply barging in is definitely out of the question.

Regardless, once we've lured them away, we'll just sneak into their base to save Cyril and Zelig!" muttered Gerald as he looked seriously at everyone.

"We're fine with that, Gerald! Detail us on how you want the plan to go! We'll follow all your orders to a T!" replied Nori.

"Well said. Anyway, about the details... I say we split into two groups till the mission is over. Nori, Ray. You two follow me into their base to save Cyril and Zelig. I'll be counting on you two to cover for me. As for you, Young Lady Zorn... I know this is a lot to ask from you, but could you be our distraction?" replied Gerald as he alternated his gaze from Nori to Juno.

"No problem! Since we're going with that, all of you should await my signal before taking any action. Once we're done with everything, let's reunite in the forest right outside Dragonblood City! How's that sound?" replied Juno as she looked at Gerald.

Hearing that, Gerald simply nodded slightly. With any luck, their plan would succeed...

Regardless, now that the plan was finalized, Juno quickly ran off to cause havoc within the Hulkerioic Union base. She was going to make sure that everyone there was going to be too distracted to even notice Gerald...

Gerald, Ray, and Nori themselves quickly began making their way across the base's grounds. Thankfully, the Hulkerioic Union had plenty of high walls, and that granted all three of them pretty good cover

Once they got to a blind spot, the trio quietly awaited Juno's signal...

Not long after, all three of them watched as a ray of light shot into the sky... before falling right into the Hulkerioic Union's base! The base had several small houses within it, and with that in mind, one of the unfortunate houses inside went up in flames the second the light hit it!

Naturally, this caused the union's people to panic, and all of them quickly began trying to put the fire out.

Seeing that, the trio knew that this was their cue to make their way inside. With that, Gerald and his party swiftly made their way into the base...Once they were over the wall, all three of them quickly scanned the area. After confirming that all the union's men were still distracted by the fire, Gerald and his party quickly snuck past the union's main hall before heading straight for the dungeon...

Nearing the corner that would lead to the dungeon, Gerald and the two others peeked to see if anyone was guarding the dungeon's entrance. Thankfully, there only appeared to be two people standing guard there.

With that in mind, after making sure that they hadn't been noticed yet, Gerald then retrieved his Astrabyss Sword before unsheathing it...

Following that, Gerald bolted toward one of the guards before expertly slicing his throat!

Barely even able to react, blood instantly gushed out of the guard's now exposed throat... And just like that, he flopped to the ground, dead.

Upon realizing that his companion was no longer among the living, the other man instantly drew his own sword and attempted to decapitate Gerald!

Of course, Gerald was able to easily dodge the attack. Following that, he kicked away the man's sword before landing another kick right in the man's stomach!

As the man held onto his now aching stomach, Gerald took the chance to punch him in the head, finishing the man off for good...

With how fast and skillful Gerald was, it was no wonder why he was able to so swiftly finish both of

them off unscathed...

Regardless, now that they had been dealt with, Gerald immediately slashed at the dungeon's chains with his sword... and seconds later, the heavy 'clunk' of chains could be heard as the chains fell to the ground.

Due to how sharp the Astrabyss Sword was, slicing through chains like these was child's play for it.

Either way, now that the entrance was no longer locked, Gerald pulled the dungeon's doors open before entering to look for his friends...

Shortly after, an extremely infuriated Tiger could be seen bursting into the hall with several men behind him. Upon seeing the two dead guards, he knew for a fact that their hostages had been saved.

Dashing outside, he was just in time to see Gerald and his friends climbing over their base's wall and escaping!

"That... That god d*mned kid succeeded in saving his friends! After him! Hurry!" roared Tiger as he instantly bolted for Gerald together with his men.

Since all of them were now over the base's wall, Gerald—who had heard Tiger's furious shout—quickly turned to look at Ray and Nori before instructing, "I want you two to lead Cyril and Zelig away from this place. I'll be distracting them while you do so!"

"...But what about you-"

"Cut the cr*p and get a move on already! Otherwise, none of us are leaving this place alive!" retorted Gerald, knowing full well what Nori was going to say.

Upon hearing that, Nori and Ray could only silently agree as they did as he instructed.

Once they were out of sight, Gerald instantly began running in the other direction. He was going to lure the union's men away from his friends if it was the last thing he did...

Just as he had hoped, Tiger and his men were able to spot him as he bolted off in the distance...

"There he is! Capture that brat and finish him off for good!" ordered the furious Tiger as he gritted his teeth.

Since Tiger and his dozen men were rather fast, they quickly managed to gain on him. To make matters worse, Gerald soon found himself sandwiched between the Hulkeroic Union and a cliff that had a bottom that couldn't even be seen...

"Give it up, kid! There's nowhere else to run!" scoffed Tiger before snorting.

Gerald honestly hadn't expected Tiger to be able to catch up to him so quickly.

Frowning slightly, Gerald then glared at Tiger before revealing a sly smile as he taunted, "Give up? What, you think you can actually kill me?"

Upon hearing that, Tiger was slightly surprised. After all, there was no way Gerald was going to be able to escape his current situation.

"Big talk coming from someone who's trapped between being beaten to death and falling to your doom! You're free to try making a leap of faith, but only death in the abyss awaits you!" snarled Tiger.

"Oh? Well allow me to try then!" retorted Gerald as he leaped down the cliff!

Staring wide-eyed, the stupefied Tiger was momentarily shocked silent that Gerald would actually choose to end his own life rather than fall into his hands.

Eventually, his frown returned and he simply snorted before leaving with his men, not even bothering to look down the abyss. After all, there was no way Gerald was going to survive that fall.

...Or at least that was what Tiger assumed.

Contrary to what Tiger had thought, Gerald was very much still alive. A large tree had broken his fall, and he was now in the embrace of several branches... Even so, the impact from falling had been a bit too much, even for him.

With that in mind, Gerald was now unconscious, suspended above a fast-flowing river with the support of the tree's strong branches...

While the blacked-out Gerald wasn't even aware that he had survived yet, Ray, Nori, Zelig, and Cyril had just made it to the forest right outside Dragonblood City...

Seeing the party of four running over, Juno—who had been waiting there for them for quite a while now—quickly told her men to support Zelig and Cyril as she rushed over as well before saying, “Ray! Nori! You’re finally here! I was starting to get worried that something bad had happened to you! Speaking of which... Where’s Gerald?”

Upon hearing that, Ray pursed his lips slightly before replying, “...He... Told us to run the opposite way so that he could bait the rest of the Hulkerioic Union away from us...!”

“...What? How dangerous!” replied Juno, shocked that Gerald had done such a thing.

Knowing that he wouldn't be a match against so many of the Hulkerioic Union's members at a time, Juno was well aware that his life was now in grave danger.

"Don't worry, Miss Zorn. You can just wait here for us as Nori and I go back to look for Gerald!" replied Ray.

"You can't! It's too dangerous! Do remember that the Hulkerioic Union is actively searching for us now! With that in mind, you'll surely get caught in no time if you go back to look for him!" replied Juno almost instantaneously.

"With all due respect, Miss Zorn, if he's dead, then we won't have the will to continue living anyway!" said Ray with a firm tone.

Before Juno could even reply, Ray and Nori had already bolted back, retracing their steps...

Seeing that, Juno could only sigh helplessly. Even so, she couldn't deny that she was feeling slightly touched. Gerald truly had good and loyal friends...

Regardless, after searching for Gerald for a while, Ray and Nori eventually arrived at the cliff where Gerald leaped off from... And to their horror, they caught a glimpse of Gerald's jade pendant lying on a stone nearby...!

Feeling her heart skip a beat, Nori remained silent for a moment before eventually feeling tears run down her cheeks...

"...No... It... It can't be...!" mumbled Nori to herself as she quickly picked the jade pendant up before staring in disbelief at the abyss beneath them...

However, since the jade pendant was so close to the cliff, then Gerald...

Patting her on the shoulder, Ray then said, "Calm yourself, Nori. Gerald will be fine. Believe in him..."

It was difficult, but both of them managed to momentarily convince themselves that Gerald was still alive. With that, they waited patiently for him by the cliff...

However, as the hours passed by, it grew increasingly difficult to bear. Eventually, the duo shook their heads before finally leaving the cliffside, feeling utterly dejected...

When Juno saw how depressed they looked when the duo finally got back to the forest, she knew that something terrible must have happened to Gerald. Her worries were further confirmed when she noticed that his jade pendant was in Ray's hand.

"...Miss Zorn... Gerald... he... he's most probably fallen down a cliff...! We say that since we were only able to find his pendant near a cliffside..." muttered Ray in a gloomy voice as he showed her the pendant.

Upon hearing that, Juno's heart sank. Reaching out to take the pendant from his hand, she paused for a moment before saying, "...Let's return to my home first. We can't just give up like this! After all, just because we haven't found him yet, it doesn't automatically mean that he's dead!"

"...You're right, Miss Zorn! We believe that he won't die that easily either! He's definitely still alive! Cheer up, Nori! Remember, we have to believe in him!" declared Ray as he attempted to cheer Nori up as well.

Hearing that, Nori slowly raised her head and nodded firmly.

Seeing that Nori was feeling a little better now, Juno took the chance to order, "That's the spirit! Regardless, we really should leave this place while we can. We aren't exactly in a safe location, so we'd best return to base before the Hulkerioic Union catches us!"

Following that, Juno then quickly led the others back to her home...

Sometime later, an unconscious Gerald could be seen lying beside a black-robed and mysterious-looking old man... Protected from the elements by stone walls all around them, their faces were illuminated by a fire that the old man had started.

Not long after, Gerald slowly opened his eyes...

Upon realizing that he was still alive, he breathed a sigh of relief. However, he quickly realized that he wasn't alone.

Frowning slightly as he looked at the person sitting by the fire, he wondered who the old man was. Was he the one who had saved him...?

"...Who... are you...? Did you save me...?"

"Also... where are we...?" asked Gerald when he realized that they were inside some kind of cave.

Though the old man appeared ragged and sloppy, he knew for a fact that he wasn't an ordinary person.

After a brief silence, the old man replied in a raspy voice, "...I'm just someone who lives in seclusion on this mountain."

Upon hearing that, Gerald was slightly surprised. To think that someone would actually live in such a place!

"...May I know your name...?"

“You can just call me Old Hughes...” replied the man.

Shortly after, Old Hughes led Gerald out of the cave they were in...

Looking at the sky, Gerald was greeted by the soothing sight of a crescent moon...

Despite how calm the night was making him feel, upon realizing that they were about to enter a dense forest, Gerald was prompted to ask, “...Mind telling me where we’re going, Old Hughes...?”

After all, with how dense the foliage was, they would surely be engulfed by darkness in there, and being in an unlit forest at night was a very unwise thing to do.

The more he tried to figure the old man out, the more mysterious Old Hughes felt to Gerald.

Regardless, Old Hughes simply ignored Gerald’s question and continued walking on...

About ten minutes later, they arrived at what seemed to be a miniature waterfall...

Despite being rather small, the quietness of the night made the sound of splashing water extremely clear.

“...What is this place...?” asked Gerald as he curiously looked around.

Ignoring Gerald’s question once more, Old Hughes simply stared indifferently at Gerald before saying, “Follow me!”

With that said, the old man then walked right into the waterfall and disappeared behind it!

Momentarily stunned, Gerald quickly shook his shock off and cautiously stuck his hand into the waterfall... before feeling the water yank him right in! The next thing he knew, the waterfall was already behind him!

Now that he knew that there was a hidden area behind the waterfall, Gerald was promptly reminded about the class tale, 'Journey to the West'. After all, there was a similar area in the tale known as the Water Curtain Cave of the Great Sage, Heaven's Equal.

Snapping out of it, Gerald quickly began looking around before asking, "...Again, what even is this place, Old Hughes...?"

They were now in a massive space surrounded by stone walls that glittered like stars... It was honestly one of the most beautiful sights Gerald had ever witnessed, and he truly hadn't expected all this to be hidden here, of all places...

In response, however, Old Hughes—who was standing not too far away—simply gestured for Gerald to come over as he said, "Get over here! There's something I want to show you!"

Raising a slight brow, Gerald then hurried over to the old man's side...

Now standing beside Old Hughes, Gerald could only stare in amazement as he realized that there was a towering and somewhat translucent stone pillar before him... Stranger still was the fact that there seemed to be something within the pillar...

"What on earth is this...?" asked Gerald curiously.

"...First off, this place is called Fishgut Cave, and sealed within this stone pillar, is an ancient longsword known as the Fishgut Sword," explained Old Hughes as he looked at Gerald.

“...The... Fishgut Sword?” asked Gerald, puzzled to hear such an odd name for a longsword.

Following that, Old Hughes retrieved a rolled-up parchment from under his coat. Unrolling it before Gerald, the first image the youth saw was of a handsome, strong man as well as an elderly-looking one standing together in a place that looked strikingly similar to where they currently were... Needless to say, it was depicting both of them in Fishgut Cave!

“...That’s... us?” asked Gerald, fully confused now.

Slowly revealing a wry smile, Hughes then replied “Bingo. It shows both of us standing at this exact spot... You know, when I first found this parchment here and saw its contents, I knew I was destined to lead someone here... And here you are, at long last!”

Naturally, Gerald was surprised by all this. However, given how serious Old Hughes was looking at him, Gerald could tell that all this wasn’t a mere bluff. How surreal that the parchment would show such an accurate representation of their current situation!

“...What exactly is all this about, Old Hughes?” asked the puzzled Gerald, not wanting to be left in the dark anymore.

How did the drawing come to be? What was this place? And why was the longsword before him so important?

“Simply put, you’re the fated one, Gerald! Since the drawing depicts me bringing you to this place, I’m sure that you’re the one who’s destined to draw the sword out from the stone pillar!” explained Old Hughes.

“...Me? Are you sure...? Can’t it be someone else...?” replied Gerald, still slightly in disbelief by Old Hughes’s claim.

“My boy, I’ve been waiting here for you ever since I obtained this drawing. If you aren’t the one, then explain our meeting here today. We were simply destined to cross paths!” said Old Hughes in response.

“...I see. Well... what’s so special about the Fishgut Sword?” asked Gerald, finally giving in as he curiously looked at the sword within the stone pillar...

Upon hearing that question, Old Hughes then looked seriously at the youth before replying, “The Fishgut Sword is an ancient longsword, said to grant its wielder waterbending skills. Since you’re the person depicted in the map, I’m sure you’re the only one qualified to wield it in the first place!”

Looking at the old man’s serious gaze, Gerald could sense that he wasn’t lying. Come to think of it, Old Hughes didn’t really have a reason to lie about such things in the first place.

“...Alright then... Well, since I’m destined to pull the sword out, how should I go about it?” asked Gerald.

Hearing that, the old man then held onto Gerald’s arm before pulling him toward a stone...

On it, Gerald saw that a palm print had been carved right into it...

“Place your hand onto it!” ordered Old Hughes.

Slightly surprised by the sudden shout, Gerald simply did as he was told before looking back at the old man and asking, “...Like this?”

“Hush!” replied Old Hughes, prompting Gerald to zip his mouth.

Now that both of them were silent, they were able to hear the gurgling of water flowing into the cave...

Moments later, both of them watched as streams of water began flowing up the stone Gerald's hand was on, all of them reaching out for the palm-shaped indent on it...

It didn't take long before the streams of water wrapped themselves around Gerald's hand. With the water itself being translucent, Gerald was only able to make out the vague outline of his hand by this point...

Without warning, the duo was then greeted by an explosive sound from behind them!

Following that, both of them were just in time to witness the Fishgut Sword flying out from the pillar! It was also then when Gerald realized that the streams of water had already retracted...

Regardless, his train of thought was cut short when he heard Old Hughes calling out, "Get the sword, Gerald!"

Upon hearing that, Gerald turned to look at the old man before heading over to retrieve the sword...

The second he grabbed onto it, a surge of power rushed from the sword and into his body. As the immense power spread from his palm before spreading throughout his body, Gerald could feel a slightly familiar unease in his elixir-of-life field...

With so much power overflowing within his elixir-of-life field, Gerald knew that he was about to undergo another breakthrough!

"I... I can feel another breakthrough coming!" exclaimed the surprised and delighted Gerald. It appeared that the Fishgut Sword was just as powerful as the Astrabyss Sword. After all, wielding the swords alone had allowed him to make breakthroughs!

Already used to similar situations, Gerald then quickly sat down before retrieving a Heaven's apple from his storage ring and eating it.

Shortly after—when the Heaven's apple took effect—Gerald successfully entered the Second rank of the Avatar Realm!

“How are you feeling now, Gerald?” asked Old Hughes in a slightly concerned tone.

Smiling subtly, Gerald then chuckled before replying, “I'm feeling great! The sword was so powerful that I was instantly able to break through another rank in my strength!”

While he was pleased by all this, he was also slightly surprised that he would be able to make a breakthrough like this. With that said, he knew he had to properly thank Old Hughes after this. After all, had it not been for the old man leading him here, Gerald wouldn't have been able to acquire the Fishgut Sword, nor would he have managed to increase his strength by this much in such a short amount of time.

With all that in mind, Gerald then bowed before the old man before saying, “Thank you for bringing me here, Old Hughes! While I'm grateful to have acquired the Fishgut Sword, I'm still rather curious about its name...”

Laughing when he heard Gerald's question, Old Hughes then explained, “Well, in actuality, its true name is the Sword of Courage! It's one of the ten ancient holy swords, you know? That power you inherited earlier... It's the power of courage that the sword bestowed upon you! You should know that only very brave people get acknowledged by the sword, and those who do are granted immense power!”

While that didn't explain why the sword was named that way, Gerald at least understood why he had been able to make a breakthrough just by holding the sword. After all, had he not been a courageous person, he wouldn't have dared to take on the task of saving the world...

So that's why the Fishgut Sword acknowledged him...

“Speaking of which... Do you know the names of the nine other ancient holy swords? Do you know where they are? I’d like to obtain them!” said Gerald, clearly interested in the swords. After all, now that he already had one of them, there was no reason for him not to get the other nine.

“Hmm? Well, if you’re interested, the first sword goes by Xyan, the Sword of Divinity. As for the second and third ones, they’re Xyan, the Sword of Benevolence, and Xenith, the Sword of Sovereignty... Empyrean was the fourth sword, I believe, and it’s the Sword of Might. The Sword of Nobility, on the other hand, is Titan, which is also the fifth sword.”

“As for swords six and seven, both of them are the Swords of Love, Gwaine and Morgen. The eighth sword is the one you’re currently wielding, Fishgut, the Sword of Courage. If I remember correctly, the ninth one is called Jochem, the Sword of Solitary, and as for the final sword, it goes by the name of Charmella, the Sword of Elegance!”

“Each of the swords bear unique powers, and anyone who manages to collect all ten of them will have powers beyond human comprehension! With that said, the wielder of those swords will surely become the strongest person in the world!” explained Old Hughes with a serious tone.

After hearing that information dump, Gerald found himself slightly overwhelmed but also very excited. After all, if he managed to collect all ten of the ancient holy swords, he would surely obtain enough power to even his battle with the demonic god!

“...I see! Then, about the location of the nine other swords...”

Shaking his head, Old Hughes then said, “I’m afraid I only know where two of the swords are, Gerald, and one of them is already in your hands! While I do know where the Titan Sword—the Sword of Might—is, you’re on your own when it comes to finding the eight other swords!”

Delighted to know that he was possibly going to obtain another sword so quickly, Gerald then exclaimed, “You know where the Titan Sword is? Could you lead me to it?”

“There’s no rush to obtain that! After all, you just got the Fishgut Sword! Regardless, don’t worry too much about the other swords! Since the Fishgut Sword already acknowledged you, I truly believe that you’re the fated one! With that in mind, you’ll surely obtain the other swords one day!” replied Old Hughes with a smile.

“...I suppose you’re right! Still, I truly appreciate you bringing me over today! Without your help, I’d surely be unable to obtain this sword! Worry not, I’ll surely repay your kindness one day!” declared Gerald in a grateful tone.

Laughing again, Old Hughes then waved his hand rather nonchalantly before saying, “That’s not necessary! After all, you’re fated to obtain the sword! My purpose is simply to be your guide to it! Regardless, I hope you use the sword wisely!”

Truth be told, had Gerald not been the fated master of the sword, he would’ve surely taken the sword for himself instead of waiting for the youth to come. Sadly, some things were simply predestined, and Old Hughes, of all people, understood that.

Either way, the duo soon went through the small waterfall again to leave the area. By the time they got outside, however, Gerald was surprised to see that the sun was already about to rise.

They hadn’t been in there for that long, had they? Time sure had flown...

All of a sudden, both of them heard rustling sounds swiftly coming toward them from the forest!

With both of them now vigilant of their surroundings, Gerald held the Fishgut Sword tightly in hand, fully prepared to fight...

That is, until he suddenly heard a familiar voice call out, “...Is... Is that you, Gerald...?”

The voice... It definitely belonged to Juno! “...Miss Zorn? Is that you?” asked Gerald as he faced the trees.

“...Gerald? So, it really is you!” exclaimed Juno in excitement as she quickly walked out from the trees together with her servants.

“What brings you here, Miss Zorn?” asked the surprised Gerald as he looked at her.

“What do you mean what brings us here? You’ve been gone for two days! Still, I knew you were still alive! I’m just glad I finally managed to locate you! Regardless, what are you doing all the way out here?”

Upon hearing Juno’s question, Gerald momentarily turned to look at Old Hughes before awkwardly replying, “...About that... Let’s just talk about it once we get back. Speaking of which, how are the rest doing?”

“Don’t worry, all of them are doing fine. They’re currently resting up in the Zorn family’s residence!” replied Juno with a smile as Gerald heaved a sigh of relief.

“Now then... Who is he again...?” asked Juno as she raised a slight brow while looking at Old Hughes.

Looking at the old man for a while, Gerald then turned back to face Juno as he replied, “This is Old Hughes, and he’s the one who saved me!”

“...Oh? I see! Well, then it’s a pleasure to meet you, Old Hughes! My name is Juno Zorn, and I’m the eldest young lady of the Zorn family! Thank you very much for saving Gerald!” said Juno with a gratuitous tone.

Smiling in response, Old Hughes then said, “There’s no need to thank me! Anyone would’ve done the same! After all, as the saying goes, ‘Saving a life brings more merit than building a seven-floored pagoda’! Also, the pleasure is mine, eldest young lady of the Zorn family!”

While he naturally knew about the Zorns, this was Old Hughes first time actually meeting someone from that family.

“Well, now that you’re safe, let’s go back to my place, Gerald!” said Juno. After all, it still wasn’t all that safe staying out here for long periods of time.

Hearing that, Gerald then turned to face the old man before asking, “Agreed! Speaking of which, why don’t you come along with us, Old Hughes? Regardless of what you say, I’d still like to properly thank you for all that you’ve done!”

“Gerald’s right! With that in mind, please come along with us, Old Hughes!” seconded Juno.

In response, however, Old Hughes simply smiled as he shook his head before saying, “What that sounds lovely, I’ll have to refuse...”

Seeing that the old man was really unwilling to come along, Gerald could only helplessly say, “...Well, alright then... Since that’s the case, I’ll thank you one final time then! Worry not, I’ll surely find a chance to repay your kindness!”

Chuckling in response, Old Hughes simply replied, “Alright, alright, off you go! Be careful out there, and remember! Use it wisely!”

Upon hearing that, Gerald nodded firmly. Even if the old man hadn’t reminded him, Gerald would’ve used the sword properly anyway.

Following that, Gerald, Juno, and her men then slowly disappeared into the forest...

However, not long after that group left, a shadowy figure leaped out from the forest, followed by a dozen more men in black garb...

Stopping right in front of Old Hughes, the shadowy figure then revealed a sinister expression as he asked, "How did it go, Master Hughes?"

Staring back at the shadowy person, Old Hughes simply replied, "The sword is now in Gerald's hands. With that said, it's now your turn to do your job!" "Heh! But of course! Still, you really do have immense foresight, Master Hughes... Everything happened just as you've predicted!"

"Hah! It was Tiger who first betrayed me, so he only has himself to blame for me being unkind! I'll definitely take over the Hulkerioic Union by the end of all this!" sneered Old Hughes as he smiled smugly, his eyes filled with determination.

"Indeed! Speaking of which, what about Gerald and the others? Do you need me to finish them off?" asked the shadowy figure.

Raising his palm, Old Hughes then said, "Leave them be for now. After all, Gerald and his party are still useful to us. Besides, since the Fishgut Sword is now in his hands, we should at least wait for him to kill Tiger for us first before anything else."

"As you wish, Master Hughes!" replied the shadowy figure with a respectful nod...

Naturally, Gerald had no idea that the shadowy figure and Old Hughes were in cahoots...

Regardless, both Gerald and Juno soon arrived at the Zorn family's residence. By that point, the sun was already high in the sky...

Upon stepping into Nori's home, Gerald instantly called out for his friends.

Though all four of them had been sleeping in the same room—in sitting positions—at that moment,

upon hearing Gerald's voice, the group instantly jolted awake and dashed toward his voice.

The second they saw him, Nori and Ray were so ecstatic that they immediately ran over to him. Before Gerald could even react, the two were already hugging onto him tightly!

"You... You really scared me half to death, Gerald...! I thought I wasn't going to be able to see you again...!" cried out Nori as she patted Gerald's back in her excitement and joy.

"Indeed! We were worried to death about you, brother Gerald! I... I'm just glad that you're okay...!" added Ray, his entire body trembling from how relieved he was.

Laughing as he patted both their shoulders to comfort them, Gerald then replied, "There, there... I'm fine now! Still, I'll surely be showered with blessings now that I've managed to get through this disaster!"

At that moment, Zelig—who had been standing together with Cyril from afar for a while now—couldn't help but smile as he called out, "Brother Gerald...!"

Upon hearing that, Gerald got Nori and Ray off him before walking over to Zelig...

Only to see Nori rushing forward and standing right before him, staring intently straight into his eyes...

Momentarily frozen in place, unsure of what Nori was even planning to do, the confused Gerald then asked, "...Is... something the matter?"

Instead of returning a verbal reply, Nori simply held the back of his neck before pulling him close to her face... and kissing him right on his lips!

Naturally, Gerald was left utterly flabbergasted. To think that Nori would be this proactive!

Even the others were shocked, but they soon found themselves giggling like schoolchildren.

Whatever the case was, now that Gerald was finally back, Juno could finally breathe easy. Everything was going to be fine as long as Gerald was safe...

“...Humph! So, you still know how to return, huh? And here I thought you had died somewhere alone!” grumbled Nori as she glared at Gerald.

Scratching the back of his head slightly awkwardly, Gerald simply smiled back at her before replying, “...Well... I guess I’m just a lucky guy!” Meanwhile, Old Hughes could be seen leading the shadowy figure and a few men across a mountain range that was surrounded by flames. With lava and fire everywhere, it made the mountain not only feel hot, but also rather intimidating...

The group was here to help the shadowy figure obtain the Sword of Might, which—just like the Fishgut Sword which was also born in the same generation—was an ancient weapon. While such swords had restrictions as to who was able to wield them, if the sword deemed the user worthy, then the wielder would be granted the sword’s powers, and each sword naturally had different powers.

Regardless, now that the Fishgut Sword was in Gerald’s hands, it was the shadowy figure’s turn to obtain his own sword. Upon obtaining the Sword of Might, he would undoubtedly be strong and confident enough to overtake Dragonblood City...

Soon enough, they arrived at a cave... and upon entering, everyone was able to see vein-like streams of lava creeping all over the cave’s walls.

After walking for a bit, Old Hughes turned to face the shadowy figure before looking at a stone pillar while saying, “The cave we’re in is called the Titan Cave, and the Sword of Might is within the stone pillar in front of us!”

Frankly speaking, the layout of this cave wasn’t all that different compared to Fishgut Cave, the only

major—and obvious—difference being all the lava streams as well as the immense heat.

“I see! So that’s the ancient Sword of Might that possesses the power of fire!” declared the shadowy figure.

“Indeed it is... See that stone over there? The one with the palmprint carved into it? Place your hand on it and it’ll transfer the power of fire into your body! Following that, you’ll be able to unlock the stone pillar to obtain the sword!” explained Old Hughes.

Upon hearing that, the shadowy figure did as he was told... and the second his palm fitted into the carving, the stone instantly reacted by summoning red-hot flames that quickly engulfed the shadowy figure’s hand!

Clenching his teeth, the shadowy figure resisted the urge to shout as his hand burned within the flames.

“Endure it. This is the only way you’ll be able to obtain the sword,” said Old Hughes when he saw how pale the shadowy figure’s face was getting.

Understanding that if he retracted his hand now, all his previous pain would’ve been for nothing, the shadowy figure simply continued tolerating the pain as best as he could...

With blue veins already bulging horribly on his arm, the shadowy figure couldn’t help but scream in agony when his entire body suddenly ignited!

Barely a second later, an explosive sound that resounded throughout the cave could be heard coming from behind them.

Looking back, it appeared that the stone pillar had cracked open due to the immense flames...

With the Sword of Might now free from its confines, everyone was able to see how beautiful the blade was. With the handle decorated with fiery red lines and the blade carved with draconic patterns, the Sword of Might truly looked majestic...

By this point, the shadowy figure himself had already recovered from his pain. Quickly walking over to the stone pillar, he instantly grabbed the sword's handle before forcefully yanking it out!

The second the sword was pulled out, dragon-like flames instantly surged out from the sword's blade...

A sinister smile on his face, the shadowy figure then lifted the sword high as he laughed arrogantly before declaring, "The Sword of Might... It's finally mine! The world is going to be mine soon!"

To the shadowy figure, owning the Titan Sword essentially meant that he had just obtained immeasurable power.

Due to the Sword of Might's ability to completely melt anyone it killed, not only would the shadowy figure now be able to kill in the blink of an eye, but no bones or blood of his victims would even remain! It truly was a terrifying item...

Seeing that the shadowy figure had successfully wielded the sword, Old Hughes then walked up to him before saying, "Now that you've obtained the Sword of Might, you must remember to keep your promise of letting me be in charge of Dragonblood city after you've conquered it."

Naturally, Old Hughes hadn't led the shadowy figure here with the goodness in his heart. The truth was, he had only done so just so that he could end up becoming the supreme leader of Dragonblood city once the shadowy figure obtained the sword's power.

As for why he had allowed Gerald to obtain the Fishgut Sword first, it was essentially so that the Titan Sword could be retrieved in the first place. Putting it bluntly, the Fishgut Sword acted as a sort of seal that prevented the Titan Sword from being obtained. This meant that the Titan Sword could only be taken once the Fishgut Sword was retrieved. In layman's terms, it was basically like how water and fire

contradicted each other.

Regardless, after hearing what Old Hughes had to say, the shadowy figure revealed a sly smile before staring wickedly at the old man as he said, "You know, I still don't know for sure how powerful this sword is, Master Hughes. How can I be sure that I'll be able to conquer Dragonblood City without testing it first...?"

"You don't have to worry about that! Now that the Fishgut Sword is no longer sealing the Titan Sword's power, its strength has been greatly enhanced! A simple swing of the sword is sufficient in dealing massive damage to your surroundings! As for what happens when you slash someone with it, I'm sure you already know that the person will instantly melt!" replied Old Hughes with a smile, not realizing that his final moments were near.

"How powerful! Though again, I believe that I really should test it on someone to see the effects for myself..." sneered the smirking shadowy figure as he looked at Old Hughes with an evil glint in his eyes.

Now feeling rather uneasy from the shadowy figure's expression, Old Hughes couldn't help but stutter, "...You... W-what are you planning to do?"

"Oh, nothing much... I'm just using you as my test subject!" yelled the shadowy figure as he instantly stabbed Old Hughes head with a malicious smile on his face!

With his head instantly catching fire, Old Hughes could only scream in agony as the fire spread to the rest of his body!

Watching as fiery-red lines began coursing throughout the old man's dying body, the shadowy figure was now able to confirm the true power of the Sword of Might. As the old man had said, a single slash really was sufficient to completely melt a person!

Old Hughes himself hadn't expected such a terrible fate to befall himself, but there was little that he could do now...

Soon enough, all that remained of the old man was a slowly diminishing flame...

“As if I’d still have a use for you after obtaining the Titan Sword... Planning on taking over Dragonblood City on my watch? Dream on!” scoffed the shadowy figure as he glared at the dying flame.

Old Hughes was merely a pawn to him. A pawn to help him obtain the sword...

Now that the pawn had fulfilled its purpose, it no longer had any use to him...That night, chaos ensued within Dragonblood City.

The Hulkerioic Union was completely wiped out, and Tiger himself—the leader of the union—met a grisly end with all his limbs butchered right off his body...

Naturally, news of that struck fear in not only the people of the city, but also all the major clans there...

Regardless, when morning came, Gerald and the others were resting in the Zorn family’s home when all of a sudden, they were alerted by the presence of several people swiftly approaching them.

The second they got their weapons ready, they were just in time to witness a shadowy figure descending from the sky, followed shortly after by several more men dressed fully in black.

“...They’re strong and have malicious intent, Gerald. Please, be careful...!” whispered Juno.

Gerald himself was well aware of this, though he simply nodded in response. From what he could see, the shadowy figure—who was releasing an immense murderous intent—had at least entered the Third Rank of the Avatar Realm...

After a short pause, Gerald cleared his throat before asking, "...Who are you? And why are you here?"

Truth be told, Gerald felt that he had never come across this person before. With that in mind, he was wondering why the shadowy figure was here to cause trouble for him and his friends.

"Look, just hand the Fishgut Sword over and I'll spare your life!" sneered the shadowy figure without beating around the bush.

Upon hearing that, Gerald's expression darkened almost instantaneously. To think that the shadowy figure not only knew about the Fishgut sword, but he also knew that it was in Gerald's possession!

"What kind of sword even is that? I don't know what you're talking about!" bluffed Gerald.

"Cut the cr*p and stop playing dumb! I'm well aware that Old Hughes led you to that sword! Now hand it over or you'll soon be meeting him in the afterlife!" threatened the shadowy figure.

Upon hearing that, Gerald instantly knew that something must've happened to Old Hughes.

"...You... What have you done to him?!" growled Gerald, a frown on his face as he glared at the shadowy figure.

Laughing hysterically in response, the shadowy figure then retorted, "Gerald, Gerald, Gerald... You truly are too innocent for your own good! Do you really respect that old buffoon? He was simply using you! Just so you know, he only let you get the Fishgut Sword first so that I could obtain the Titan Sword! The Sword of Might! The deal was for me to wipe out the Hulkerioic Union and make him the supreme leader of Dragonblood City after I obtained the sword! Of course, things didn't go as he planned... But why am I telling you all this, you'll soon be meeting him in hell anyway!"

After hearing all that, Gerald found himself momentarily flabbergasted. To think that Old Hughes was actually such a person...

“...What do you mean you were only able to obtain the Titan Sword after I got the Fishgut Sword? How are those two things even related?” asked Gerald.

“Hah! You see, the Fishgut Sword was sealing the Titan Sword! Thanks to you taking it away, I was able to obtain the Titan Sword!” explained the shadowy figure.

So that’s why... It appeared that he truly had been used.

Following that, the shadowy figure even lifted the Titan Sword for Gerald to see, the sword constantly emitting strong, crimson flames and an overwhelming aura...“Regardless, don’t make me repeat myself! Hand over the Fishgut Sword and I’ll spare your lives! Otherwise, you’ll all get a taste of the Titan Sword!” threatened the shadowy figure.

Naturally, Gerald wasn’t going to hand it over that easily. After all, the Fishgut Sword was one of the ten ancient holy swords. It wasn’t easy for him to obtain it, so he sure as hell wasn’t going to just give it away so simply.

Truth be told, Gerald also felt that the shadowy figure wasn’t strong enough to defeat him. With that in mind, Gerald wondered if he could obtain the Titan Sword as well after defeating him...

As an idea came to him, Gerald paused for a moment before yelling, “All of you, seek shelter first! I’ll deal with him!”

Whatever the case was, Juno and the others weren’t the shadowy figure’s match. With that in mind, them staying here for any longer would only result in them getting killed.

Understanding that they would only be a burden to him in this situation, Gerald’s party simply exchanged glances before nodding and rushing off.

Once Gerald was sure that they were gone, he then turned to face the shadowy figure before declaring, "I propose that we have a duel to the death! Just the two of us! If I lose, you can have my life as well as the Fishgut Sword! However, you'll also have to promise that you'll spare my friends' lives. Deal?"

Without even the slightest hesitation, the shadowy figure then replied, "Deal! As if I'd ever lose with the Sword of Might in my hands!"

To the shadowy figure, Gerald wasn't ever going to be his match. After all, possessing the Titan Sword was akin to him holding all the power in the world, and that definitely served to amplify his arrogance...

Even so, since both of them had already entered the Third rank of the Avatar Realm, it wasn't clear who would be the victor of this battle...

Either way, after wielding their swords and getting into their attack stances, both of them simply glared at each other, remaining motionless as they awaited the other party to strike...

Without the slightest warning, the shadowy figure then let out a mighty roar before swinging his sword and sending a surge of flames flying toward Gerald! With how fast the solidified flames were flying toward Gerald, any regular person getting hit by that attack would surely end up getting sliced in half!

Of course, Gerald wasn't afraid at all. Instead, he simply swung the Fishgut Sword, sending his own surge of sparkling water flying toward the shadowy figure's attack!

It was clear that the shadowy figure had forgotten that water triumphed over fire. As proof of that, the Titan Sword was only able to be obtained after the Fishgut Sword was pulled out. With that in mind, just like how water could put fire out, the Fishgut Sword could easily cancel out any of the Titan Sword's attacks.

With that in mind, Gerald's surge of water easily put out the shadowy figure's fiery attack!

Naturally, this stunned the shadowy figure. He hadn't taken this into account!

Seeing that the shadowy figure was momentarily flabbergasted, Gerald quickly took the chance to fish out a talisman—from his storage ring—before tossing it into the sky!

The next thing the shadowy figure knew, the talisman had burned up in the air, summoning several prickly liana vines that quickly wrapped themselves around him!

Following that, Gerald quickly summoned the Astrabyss Sword before pointing its blade toward the sky and yelling, "By the Power of the Astrabyss!"

Immediately after, a purple vortex with flickering lightning began forming in the sky... and seconds later, a beam of light bolted out of the vortex and right into the Astrabyss Sword!

With that done, Gerald then swung his sword down hard, sending a surge of blinding white light flying toward the shadowy figure!

The shadowy figure could only scream in agony as the light sliced through his body...! Until no further screaming followed.

Now nothing but ashes, the shadowy figure was no more. Till his dying breath, he hadn't expected to be killed off by Gerald so easily...With the shadowy figure now dead, his men instantly turned to face each other before fleeing the area! After all, now that their boss was dead, there was no point in them staying there for any longer.

Realizing that there was a token of sorts within the shadowy figure's ashes, Gerald picked it up to see what was written on it...

The words 'Ghost Sect' had been carved intricately onto the token, and Gerald could only raise a slight brow when he saw that. What kind of mysterious organization could the Ghost Sect be...?

His train of thought was cut short when he suddenly heard Nori calling out, "Gerald!"

Turning around, he watched as his friends quickly ran toward him.

Stopping right before Gerald, Nori then asked in a concerned tone, "Are you alright, Gerald? Are you hurt anywhere?"

Smiling in response, Gerald simply said, "Don't worry, I'm fine!"

Upon hearing that, Nori and the others were instantly relieved. To them, as long as Gerald was fine, all was well in the world...

Now that things had calmed down, Gerald turned to look at the Titan Sword that was hovering menacingly in the air...

Walking over to it, he then grabbed onto the hilt... and the second he did, hot and powerful energy surged right through his palm and into his elixir-of-life field!

With how burning-hot his elixir-of-life field was now feeling, Gerald could tell that all the pain he was currently experiencing was due to the sword's power!

"G-Gerald? What's wrong?" asked Nori when she saw his pained expression.

"Stay back!" yelled Gerald as he quickly sat at the side.

Hearing that, Nori and the others didn't dare go close to him. They could only stare at him from afar, hoping that he would turn out fine...

Regardless, Gerald quickly took out a Heaven's apple before devouring it. Once that was done, he instantly began meditating.

To his shock, eating the holy fruit didn't lessen the fiery sensation in his body at all. In fact, it only made it more intense!

Yelling in agony, Gerald's forehead was now drenched in sweat, showing just how much pain the sword's power was inflicting onto him.

It wasn't long after before Gerald eventually collapsed from the excruciating pain!

Upon seeing that, Nori immediately shouted, "Gerald...!"

As she ran over to check on him, Juno herself quickly ordered her servants to carry him over into a room to rest.

Unbeknownst to the others, the Titan and Fishgut Sword had both morphed into a single beam of light that then entered Gerald's body...

It would take an entire day before Gerald regained consciousness again...

When the dazed youth finally awoke, the first thing he saw was Nori lying by the side of his bed. He couldn't help but think how lovely she looked, even when she was asleep...

Her ears twitching as his bedsheets rustled, Nori woke with a start before looking at Gerald and joyously exclaiming, "G-Gerald! You're finally awake...!"

After Gerald fainted the day before, all his friends had been scared half to death, thinking that something terrible had befallen him...

Now that he was awake, Nori could finally breathe a little easier...

Nodding slowly in response, Gerald quickly found that he barely had any energy to even move.

Still, while he was now feeling extremely weak, Gerald could tell that he had surprisingly already breached into yet another rank! With that said, he was now in the Fourth rank of the Avatar Realm...

While that was the case, why was he feeling so weak after advancing? It truly was puzzling...

As he thought about it, he figured that it had something to do with the Sword of Might. After all, before fainting, he vaguely remembered that not only had the fiery power of the Titan Sword surged into his body, but his own power had also been continuously sapped by something.

Whatever the case was, the Sword of Might truly was a powerful weapon... Even more powerful than the Fishgut Sword, in fact.

Though that was the case, why was the shadowy figure not Gerald's match when he wielded it? From what Gerald could tell, it was because he wasn't the fated one. With that in mind, the shadowy figure probably wasn't able to inherit and use the sword's power at its fullest potential.

With that in mind, Gerald—being the fated one—probably experienced the full brunt of the sword's power due to the Titan Sword acknowledging him, which led to him eventually fainting...

After thinking about it for a while, Gerald felt that his thought process made sense, and that all that pain was necessary so that he could possess the full power of the Titan Sword...

Now that his questions had been answered, Gerald retrieved a Heaven's apple from his storage ring before slowly munching on it...

Not only was the holy fruit able to help him undergo breakthroughs, but it was also capable of healing injuries and restoring his energy. It truly was a treasured special medicine...

True enough, after finishing the fruit, Gerald promptly regained his strength, and the aura in his body finally stabilized...

Now that he had recovered, Gerald got out of bed before leaving the room together with Nori...

As they passed by the courtyard, the duo saw Ray and the other two from his party chatting there.

Upon realizing that Gerald had regained consciousness, the surprised Ray quickly ran over to him while shouting, "Brother Gerald! You're awake!"

Cyril ran over as well, and he quickly added in a concerned tone, "How are you feeling? Are you alright? You scared us half to death yesterday, you know?"

Smiling as he shook his head, Gerald then replied, "I'm feeling fine now! The power of the Titan Sword was simply too immense, which was why I ended up fainting yesterday!"

"I see! Speaking of which, Brother Gerald, I can't help but notice that your power's increased again... Have you broken through?" asked Ray observantly as he looked at Gerald.

"You're right! I was surprised to find out about that too, but I guess I've now entered the Fourth rank in the Avatar Realm!" replied Gerald.

Being able to rise up two ranks in less than a week... Gerald truly was enviable...

“You really are a god for being able to break through so fast, Brother Gerald! To think that you’ve already entered the Fourth rank of the Avatar Realm... You simply are too powerful!” praised Cyril with a smile.

After all, regular people couldn’t even break through a single rank after cultivating for decades and even centuries! Yet here Gerald was, rising the ranks so easily! If those who had trained for so long knew about this, they’d surely be irritated to death!

Chuckling in response, Gerald simply said in a humble tone, “It’s nothing, really. I’m just really lucky!”

Shaking his head, Ray paused for a moment before taking out a black token and handing it to Gerald as he said, “Speaking of which, Brother Gerald, you dropped this black token the day before... Where exactly did you get this?”

“Ah, that token was all that remained after he died. Why? Do you know about the token?” asked Gerald.

Nodding in response, Ray then explained, “It’s an exclusive item of the Ghost Sect!”

“Ray, what exactly is this Ghost Sect?” Gerald asked curiously.

Then, Ray started explaining in detail.

After listening to the explanation, Gerald and the rest understood it now. Apparently, Ghost Sect was a place where the ghosts lived, and the black shadow should be a member of Ghost Sect.

“Then, how can I go there?”

After a pause, Gerald asked boldly.

Ray opened his eyes wide and stared at him in surprise upon hearing him. He didn't expect that Gerald would have this idea.

Ghost Sect was not a place that anyone could go to. It was in the territory of Ghost Realm, a place for lonely souls and wild ghosts which were ruled by the Ghost King.

"Brother Gerald, Ghost Sect is not a good place. It is better not to go there!"

Ray reminded Gerald seriously.

"Ray, don't worry. Since this matter is related to Ghost Sect, I think I should go there and investigate!" Gerald patted on his shoulder and said.

Why did the people of Ghost Sect come to Dragonblood City and try to snatch this ancient holy sword away? This mystery made Gerald very puzzled. He had to solve it.

"Alright. Since you insist on going, I will go with you!"

Ray knew that he could not persuade Gerald not to go, so he could only choose to accompany him.

After that, Ray told Gerald the time when Ghost Sect was opened and its location.

Two days later, at midnight.

This was the day when the entrance of Ghost Sect would open.

On this day, all the ghosts would gather here to enter Ghost Sect.

Gerald and Ray went to the entrance of Ghost Sect. As for the other three, Gerald did not let them come along to avoid being noticed.

There were a lot of ghosts at the entrance.

It was the first time Gerald had seen so many ghosts, and this amazed him.

“Ray, will these ghosts hurt people?”

Gerald leaned closer to Ray and whispered into his ear.

Ray shook his head slightly and replied, “Don’t worry, they won’t. Today is the day of peace. No ghost can hurt other ghosts.”

Hearing this, Gerald felt relieved.

However, they only had twelve hours, or to be precise, it was Gerald who only had twelve hours.

When the time was up, he had to leave Ghost Sect immediately, or he would not be able to get out forever and remain there as a ghost.

Soon, it was time. The door of the spiritual world opened, and all the ghosts flocked in.

Ray led Gerald into the spiritual world through the door.

Once inside, they saw a huge ghost city where many ghosts had set up stalls to sell things just like a town in the olden days.

Today was the most enjoyable day for the ghost because they could come to Ghost Sect to buy things for themselves. The only thing was that they did not trade with ordinary coins, but coins specially used in Ghost Sect. So, they had to go to exchange for some.

“Ray, are all these things around here edible? They’re making me hungry!”

Walking along the street, Gerald saw a lot of food around him which made him hungry, so he asked.

“Hehe, you can eat them, but you will lose a lot of masculine aura once you do so because these are food for ghosts, not humans.”

Ray smiled and replied to Gerald.

Gerald was discouraged immediately upon hearing this. He did not dare to think about it anymore as he did not want to lose his masculine aura.

“Let’s go. I’ll bring you to a place!”

Ray told Gerald and brought him to a building not far away with big steps.

Once inside, Gerald realized that it was a huge casino.

This was a casino in Ghost Sect. It was different from the casinos in the human world.

“Ray, why do I have a feeling that the ghosts can’t feel me?”

Suddenly, Gerald discovered something and asked Ray.

He had a feeling that he was being totally ignored, and the ghosts around didn’t notice him at all. What made him feel even stranger was that some ghosts even passed right through his body.

“Because you are not a real ghost, they won’t discover you. Moreover, no humans are allowed in here!”

Ray explained to Gerald immediately.

When Gerald heard him, he was very excited. That would mean that he was invisible right now.

“Gerald, it’s up to you now. You can use your invisibility to help me gamble so that we can win some money to buy some good things.”

Ray suggested to Gerald.

“Alright, Ray. No problem, just watch me!”

Gerald agreed without reservation. It was great that he had finally found his advantage here.

Later, Ray got Gerald to stand in the innermost position so that he could get a good peep to see everything.

As for Ray, he sat in front of the table. Just a moment ago, when he was squeezing through the crowd,

he had stolen a ghost coin from a ghost to make the coin his startup capital.

Soon after, the ghost standing in the middle of the table started to roll the dice.

After rolling for a while, the ghost covered the dice with a lid, and Ray looked at Gerald who was behind the ghost.

After a quick peek, Gerald gave Ray a hand signal.

“I bet low!”

After seeing Gerald’s hand signal, Ray shouted loudly.

Then, he put the money on the low slot.

After making his bet, the ghost revealed the dice.

When he opened it, it was indeed a low number.

This made the ghosts around them applaud. They didn’t expect Ray to be so good at gambling so much so that he had made profits in just one go.

However, Ray did not plan to stop there.

Since they were already there, he wanted to make a fortune.

Soon after, the second round started.

Just like before, the ghost in the middle rolled the dice.

Then, he covered the dice again.

Meanwhile, Gerald, who was behind the ghost, told Ray the number using hand signals.

After looking at the hand signal, Ray put all his money on the low slot once more.

“I still want to bet low!”

Ray shouted and put all the money on the low slot.

Later, the ghost revealed the dice.

Sure enough, it was a low number.

Ray won again. But this time, he won much more than the first time.

“Alright, I have had enough, so I’ll stop playing!”

He had made enough to afford a feast. Therefore, Ray didn’t want to continue gambling.

However, there was an unspoken rule in casinos in the human world, and that was, those who won should not leave. Of course, this applied to casinos in the spiritual world as well.

“Wait!”

Before Ray could take another step, a few ghosts stopped him.

The ghost standing in the middle walked toward Ray and stared at him. “There is no such thing as leaving after winning.”

“Why? Do you guys have the guts to play the game? Or is it that you can’t afford to lose?”

Ray stared at the ghost coldly. He didn’t expect that the ghost here would be just like humans in the real world, playing rogue when they couldn’t afford to lose. They still wanted to be rascals when they were already ghosts. This irritated Ray a lot.

“Huh! You can either continue to gamble until you lose all the money, or you can hand over the money before you leave. There are two options, you choose!”

The ghost standing in the middle sneered and warned Ray, staring at him with threatening eyes.

It seemed that the ghost did not plan to let him leave.

Since that was the case, Ray would not let them have their way.

“Is that so? What if I don’t choose either of them?”

Ray looked at them and asked again.

“Then, don’t blame us for not showing mercy!”

The ghost in the middle snorted and signaled the ghosts around him.

Right after, the surrounding ghosts charged toward Ray and Gerald.

Since they had made their moves, Gerald was definitely not going to spare them.

He summoned his Fishgut Sword immediately and slashed them.

Swish!

At once, the Fishgut Sword wiped out a few ghosts effortlessly.

Seeing this, the ghost standing in the middle showed fear on his face. He didn’t know that Gerald would be this powerful and possess such a powerful weapon.

“You are not a ghost, but a human!”

The ghost shouted in surprise.

“Hehe. Good that you know now. So, are you still going to stop me?”

Gerald smirked and asked the ghost.

Now, the ghost did not dare to be arrogant anymore. He lowered his head and said, “No, I won’t dare to.

Please, you may leave!”

Hearing this, Gerald smiled in satisfaction. Then, he left the casino with Ray.

After they had left, Gerald and Ray found a spot to sit down.

“Wow, that’s so much money!”

Gerald’s eyes glowed as he looked at the bag full of money in Ray’s arms.

“Hehe. This is not real money, but the money of ghosts.”

Ray chuckled and explained to Gerald.

The money could only be used in Ghost Sect. It couldn’t be used in the real world, so, it was kind of useless even if they had a lot.

“Ray, I’m very hungry. What should I do?”

As Gerald was talking to Ray, his stomach was already rumbling loudly.

“Okay. Let me see if there’s a place where you can eat. We should find a place to spend the money!”

Once he heard that, Ray suggested to Gerald.

Then, Ray started scouring Ghost Sect with Gerald.

Soon, Ray saw a big restaurant that looked similar to a restaurant in the real world.

He led Gerald into the restaurant.

“Boss!”

Ray shouted loudly once he went in, only to see a man in white come out from inside and greet them with a bright smile.

“Hehe. What would you like to eat?”

The restaurateur asked both Ray and Gerald.

Hearing this, Ray and Gerald were shocked. They didn’t expect that the restaurateur could see Gerald.

“You can see me?” Gerald looked at the restaurateur in surprise and asked.

“Of course!”

The restaurateur smiled and answered.

Hearing this, Gerald looked at Ray immediately and started worrying.

“Ray, it can’t be that the effect of my medicine has passed, right?”

Gerald asked Ray in surprise, then, he quickly took out his mobile phone to check the time.

Looking at the time, twelve hours were not up yet. He had only been here for two hours.

But why could this restaurateur see him? This made Gerald wonder in astonishment.

“Boss, why can you see him?”

Ray asked the restaurateur curiously.

“Ha! Ha! Because I’m a human, just like you!”

The restaurateur smiled and explained.

Ray and Gerald finally understood the situation. So, that was why.

“Are you also a half-phantom?”

Ray asked suspiciously.

The restaurateur nodded and said, “Yes, I am. Let me introduce myself. My name is Garren Henry. I’m the owner of this restaurant, and I am specifically responsible for receiving people from the real world here!”

“Nice to meet you, Garren. I am Ray Leighton, and this is my friend, Gerald Crawford. We were hungry, so we came to get some food. Since we are not half-phantom, we can’t eat the food in Ghost Sect!”

Then, Ray introduced himself to Garren and explained the reason for coming to this place.

“No problem. Don’t worry. The food I serve here is safe for humans!”

Garren said immediately.

Then, he seated Ray and Gerald at a table

“Garren, do humans come here often?”

Once seated, Ray asked Garren.

“Not really. Most of the guests who come here are ghosts. Humans rarely come. Besides, I only come here for business when the entrance of the spiritual world is open. You are the first two humans from the real world I’ve met,” Garren explained.

“Right, you don’t look like ordinary people. You must be cultivators, right?”

After that, Garren looked at Ray again and asked.

Ray was startled when he heard Garren’s words. He didn’t expect that Garren would know.

“How did you know?”

Ray asked in surprise.

“Hehe. People who come to my place are all cultivators. There wouldn’t be any other people!”

Garren chuckled and explained.

“Then, you must be one as well!”

Ray stared at Garren. Since he was a half-phantom, he had to also be a cultivator.

“Hehe, I’m not really a cultivator. It’s just that I became like this because of an accident.”

Garren laughed bitterly and explained.

In truth, there were very few people who could become half-phantoms. Some by accident, and some by experiment.

However, Ray and Juno had become half-phantoms due to accidents.

Soon after, Garren served a lot of food on their table. All the food was from the real world.

Looking at the food, their eyes glowed.

“Come on, dig in. There’s more if this is not enough!”

Garren told them.

After that, Gerald and Ray started feasting.

“By the way, did you guys come here for the Ghostly Pearl?”

“Ghostly Pearl?”

Gerald was puzzled when he heard that.

It was his first time hearing about this Ghostly Pearl.

“What? You don’t know about it?”

Garren saw Gerald’s puzzled look and asked in surprise.

Gerald and Ray shook their heads.

“The Ghostly Pearl is the treasure of Ghost Sect. It is said that it can increase one’s cultivation level manyfold. That’s why many soul cultivators wanted to steal it. And yet, you actually don’t know about it?”

Garren stared at Gerald in surprise as he explained, his face expressing his disbelief.

“Then, where can I get this Ghostly Pearl?”

Gerald asked directly.

Since the Ghostly Pearl was so precious, it triggered Gerald’s interest greatly. Now, he was thinking of getting it.

“It’s not that easy. The Ghostly Pearl is in the hand of Ghost King. It’s the treasure of Ghost King, so getting the Ghostly Pearl would not be a simple task. Many soul cultivators died at his hands!”

Later, Garren told them with a doubtful look.

From Garren’s words, they knew that the Ghostly Pearl must be a very extraordinary thing. Besides, the Ghost King that he mentioned was the leader of Ghost Sect. He wasn’t someone who could be defeated by simply anyone.

“Where is Ghost King?”

Gerald continued to ask curiously.

“Ghost King is in the deepest ghost cave. That is his territory. Besides, many ghost soldiers and ghost generals are guarding the place, so it’s very difficult to get inside. Even if you do get into the cave, it’s very difficult to find the Ghostly Pearl.”

Garren told Gerald the location of Ghost King immediately.

“How long will the Ghost Sect remain open?”

After a pause, Gerald asked Garren.

Frankly speaking, this was also Gerald’s first time coming to Ghost Sect.

Although he heard about it from Old Flint, it was his first time actually coming here, and it was indeed a very different experience.

“One month. However, the entrance will be closed during the day and only open at night!” Garren replied immediately.

Upon hearing that, Gerald nodded with a serious face.

Since Ghost Sect would remain open for a month, it would mean that he had enough time to plan how to get the Ghostly Pearl.

If Gerald did not know about the Ghostly Pearl, he would not have bothered.

But now that he knew about it, he would not let go of such a great opportunity.

“Good. Garren, we need your help. I want to get this Ghostly Pearl!”

After that, Gerald told Garren definitively.

When Garren heard that, he was shocked. He didn’t expect Gerald to actually have the idea of getting the Ghostly Pearl.

“But as I told you, Gerald, the Ghostly Pearl is not that easy to obtain!”

Garren reminded Gerald worryingly.

“Yes, I know that. And that is the reason why I’m interested in it. The more difficult it is, the more I want to try. And maybe, I will succeed!”

Gerald looked at Garren with a determined face and said.

After hearing this, Garren couldn't help but agree to help.

"Alright. Tell me what I can help you with." Garren asked directly.

"I haven't thought of a plan yet. Wait until I have a plan, and I will tell you what to do!"

Gerald didn't reply to Garren's question, but he simply reminded him.

"Okay, no problem. Once you have formulated a plan, tell me, and I will do my best to help you!"

Garren agreed readily without any objection.

Right then, Garren completely treated Gerald and Ray as his friends.

Since they were friends, it was only natural for them to help each other.

"Right, I have a good thing here that I can give to your disciple!"

Just then, Garren suddenly remembered something, and he hurriedly stood up. Then, he walked into the house. After a short while, Garren walked out with a tag and handed it to Ray directly.

"What's this?"

Ray received the tag, and he asked in doubt all of a sudden.

“This...”

“This is the token of Ghost King, right?”

Without waiting for an explanation from Garren, Gerald directly revealed the name of the tag in Ray’s hand.

“That’s right. It’s the token of Ghost King, and it’s also the thing on a ghost’s body. With this, your disciple can have free access to Ghost Sect. It’s fine even if the effect of the medicine has subsided!”

Garren looked at Ray and Gerald as he explained.

Hearing that, both Gerald and Ray were very joyful. Unexpectedly, Garren actually owned such an item!

“Thank you, Boss Henry!”

Ray immediately expressed his gratitude toward Garren.

“Alright, it should be dawn soon. The large entrance of the spiritual world is about to be closed. I also need to pack up and leave this place!”

Garren looked at the time immediately after that. He found that it was almost early morning, so he immediately reminded both Gerald and Ray.

“Hmm, fine. Boss Henry, we’ll leave first, then!”

Gerald also stood up and said to Garren.

After bidding each other goodbye, Gerald brought Ray along and left the Ghost Sect directly.

By the time they went out of the large entrance of the Ghost Sect, the sky outside had turned white, just like the belly of a fish. It meant that it would soon be morning. The large entrance of the Ghost Sect was about to be closed.

“Huh!

“The fresh air is so good. It’s indeed very comfortable!”

The moment he came out, Ray looked up at the sky and sighed emotionally in a loud voice.

At that moment, the waterfall behind them was restored, and there were countless splashes of water, symbolizing that the large entrance of Ghost Sect had been officially closed.

“Gerald, I have a classmate party tonight. Can you come with me?”

In that instant, Juno suggested to Gerald.

“What time is it?”

“Seven o’clock!”

“Fine, no problem!”

Gerald chatted with Juno casually before he agreed to do so.

Since it was Juno's classmate party, Gerald certainly needed to keep her company and go with her.

Hearing that Gerald had promised to go, Juno also revealed a delighted smile.

At night.

Gerald drove a car and went to her classmate's party with her.

In Treka City. In Royal Grand Hotel.

"Juno, it seems like your classmates are quite rich."

Gerald smiled and looked at Juno, teasing her.

Juno also smiled lightly and responded, "It's been a long time since I've met them. They sent me an invitation card this time around, and that's why I know of such a classmate party!"

After she had said that, Gerald parked the car promptly. Then, he brought Juno into the hotel.

"Juno!"

At that moment, they heard a call from behind them.

Both of them immediately turned around and took a look. It was a woman in a long purple dress. She

was walking toward them with a gentle smile.

“Ruth!”

Juno suddenly squealed.

After simply exchanging pleasantries with each other, the three of them immediately went upstairs.

The classmate party was held in a large banquet hall.

“I heard that this classmate party is organized by the class monitor alone. It seems like a lot of money was spent!”

As Juno and Ruth Gurvell were walking, they chatted with each other. The three of them opened the door of the banquet hall and walked into the hall.

As soon as Juno and Ruth had entered the venue, they soon attracted all of the people’s attention in the hall.

“Miss Zorn, the beauty is here!”

Suddenly, a man’s excited voice was heard.

A man in a blue suit walked over hurriedly immediately after that. He came to stand before Gerald and the two ladies.

“Juno, finally you’re here. I’ve been waiting for you!”

The man in the blue suit was full of smiles as he looked at Juno and greeted her. His eyes were filled with fervent joy.

That person was Juno's class monitor in university, and his name was Xanry Quirke.

"Ha! Ha! Monitor, you've exaggerated it. The classmate party would still be lively even without me."

Juno smiled faintly and said.

Looking at Xanry before her made Juno feel that he was just as annoying as he used to be in the past.

The main thing was Xanry always addressed her as Juno, and it made her uncomfortable when she heard that. After all, she did not have a very close relationship with Xanry, and they were not considered particularly familiar with each other.

However, since there were so many people there, Juno had no way to say much. They were classmates, and it was unnecessary to humiliate others.

"Alas! Juno, you're wrong. If you didn't come, what's the fun of our classmate party?"

Xanry immediately grabbed the chance to say this to Juno.

Standing at the side, Gerald observed Xanry. He felt that Xanry was extremely good at pretending.

In truth, Gerald had already seen through Xanry's inner thoughts. Xanry just wanted to obtain Juno.

Unfortunately for him, Gerald was not about to give him that chance.

“Juno, is he the class monitor you mentioned before?”

Gerald deliberately walked forward and hugged Juno, asking her with a faint smile. He just wanted to do that purposely in front of Xanry to let the latter know that Juno belonged to him.

Seeing Gerald putting on such an act, Juno was not surprised. On the contrary, she felt warm inwardly with a deep sense of security.

“Hmm. That’s right. He’s my class monitor—Xanry Quirke!”

Juno looked obedient and charming, leaning close to Gerald’s shoulder as she replied to him.

Seeing this, Xanry was stunned all of a sudden. He totally did not expect that there would be such a scene.

“Juno... This is?”

After a pause, Xanry asked Juno slightly awkwardly.

Without waiting for Juno to say anything, Gerald looked at Xanry with a smile as he greeted him, “Monitor, nice to meet you. Let me introduce myself. I’m Juno’s boyfriend, and my name is Gerald Crawford!”

Hearing that, Xanry’s heart skipped a beat instantly.

It had never occurred to him that Juno had a boyfriend. It was even beyond his expectation that Juno would actually bring her boyfriend along to join the classmate party.

Putting Xanry aside, the other classmates who were around also revealed shocked expressions one after another.

They knew for a fact how madly Xanry had tried to gain Juno's affections in the past. However, he was always rejected by Juno.

Yet now, Juno actually had a boyfriend. That would indeed make them feel shocked and incredulous. They wondered what kind of person Gerald was since he was actually able to gain Juno's affections.

At that moment, Xanry was very annoyed inwardly, but he could not express that. Therefore, he could only pretend to be fine.

"Hello, nice to meet you!"

Xanry revealed a smile as he greeted Gerald.

The classmate party officially started immediately after that. Everyone took their seats one after another, sitting at the dining table as they ate and chatted among themselves.

Naturally, both Gerald and Juno sat at the same dining table with Ruth. Of course Xanry was there too.

"Come, Mr. Crawford! Let me toast to you!"

At that moment, Xanry took the initiative to stand up, holding the wine glass. He then smiled faintly at Gerald, toasted to him, and said.

Seeing that, Gerald also cordially stood up as he toasted Xanry, “Ha! Ha! Thank you, monitor!”

After he had said that, both of them gulped down the entire glass of wine at the same time.

“Ha! Ha! Mr. Crawford, you’re quite good at drinking. It seems that you must have always drunk a lot!”

When Xanry saw Gerald gulp down the glass of wine in such a frank and straightforward manner, he smiled and teased Gerald.

“There’s no such thing. I don’t drink wine usually. I only have a glass or two. Honestly, I’m not good at drinking!”

Gerald responded to Xanry in a very humble manner.

Gerald could discern that Xanry was sounding him out. However, since Xanry wanted to sound him out, he certainly had to put on an act to conform to Xanry’s action. He wanted to see what exactly Xanry wanted to do.

“If that’s the case, Mr. Crawford, you need to drink more today. After all, you’re Juno’s boyfriend. You must be extraordinary since you were able to become Juno’s boyfriend. I wonder what kind of high post you have now.”

Xanry then started asking Gerald.

Hearing that, one soon knew that Xanry had certainly started to compare himself with Gerald in an offensive manner. It seemed as though Xanry wanted to retrieve a little bit of confidence and advantage in other aspects of Gerald.

Still, no matter what Xanry wanted to do, it was to no avail. It was because Gerald felt that Xanry could never be compared with him. Xanry was entirely not on par with him.

“Ha! Ha! Monitor, you’re joking. I’m not worthy of a high post, and I’m just doing a small business myself.”

Gerald smiled very calmly as he looked at Xanry and responded.

Hearing that, Xanry was deeply happy inwardly. He was wondering what kind of job Gerald had, but Gerald had absolutely no way to be compared to him.

“Mr. Crawford, you’re very humble. Come, Mr. Crawford. Let’s have another glass of wine!”

Xanry lifted his wine glass again and toasted Gerald, saying such words. He wanted to make Gerald drunk.

Gerald certainly would not let Xanry have his way. It was because Xanry could never imagine how good at drinking Gerald was.

Soon, the first stage of the classmate party was over.

After the meal, the subsequent activity was certainly the amusement activities.

“Ladies and gentlemen, I’ve booked the entertainment hall upstairs. Do go upstairs and have fun. I’ll pay for all expenses tonight!”

Xanry then shouted at the surrounding classmates in a loud voice.

Hearing that, the surrounding classmates cheered and whooped loudly one after another. It made Xanry

feel very good, and he felt that he had everyone's attention at that moment.

After that, they went to the entertainment hall upstairs.

Meanwhile, Gerald sat on the sofa at the side with Juno and Ruth.

"Juno, your class monitor is very generous."

After they had sat down, Gerald inevitably made a sarcastic joke and said to Juno.

Quite frankly, Gerald's words were filled with ridicule. In truth, he knew that Xanry just wanted to show himself off by doing so, making himself the center of attraction. Xanry wanted everyone to think that he was very successful.

After Juno heard that, she said nothing. She was uninterested in anything related to Xanry.

Just then, they saw Xanry walking toward them.

"Mr. Crawford, it turns out that you're here. Why are you sitting here? Do you want to go and play bowling with me?"

Xanry walked over to Gerald and suggested, full of smiles. "Bowling? Alas! I truly have never played it before."

After Gerald heard that, he pretended to reply in doubt.

Since he wanted to put on an act, he certainly needed to go through with it. He wanted to have fun with Xanry properly.

“It’s fine. Let me teach you. Come! Let’s go and have fun!”

After Xanry heard that, he was not doubtful at all. He cheerfully said this to Gerald.

“Alright, then. I’ll go and have fun with you!”

Gerald directly agreed to do so. After that, he looked toward Juno.

“Juno, I’ll go and play bowling for a while. Just have a chat here!”

After Juno heard that, she naturally had no objection. She knew that Gerald certainly had his own thoughts. Naturally, she would not stop him. She could only remark that it was not a good choice for Xanry to look for trouble with Gerald. Till then, Xanry would definitely regret it.

Soon Gerald had arrived at the bowling alley with Xanry.

Both Xanry and Gerald occupied a lane respectively.

“Come, Mr. Crawford. I’ll teach you how to play this game. Just observe me!”

Xanry smiled and said to Gerald. After that, he picked up a bowling ball and held it in his hand.

Xanry walked forward and then exerted himself, pulling the bowling ball in his hand backward before throwing it forward.

The bowling ball soon started rolling in the lane.

Bang!

With that one shot, the pins were hit directly. Xanry's shot directly knocked down all of the pins.

Seeing that, Gerald knew that Xanry clearly had considerable experience with bowling. Besides, he was also a person with very powerful strength.

It seemed like Xanry had deliberately asked him to play bowling together just for the sake of bullying him.

But Xanry had assumed that Gerald was too weak.

Unbeknownst to him, Gerald had played bowling before. Not only that, but he also had a lot of experience.

Gerald had deliberately claimed that he did not know how to play bowling just so Xanry would not see through his act. It was all for the sake of exposing Xanry's true colors.

Since Xanry wanted to play this game, Gerald would play with him properly.

"Come, Mr. Crawford. Give it a try!"

At that moment, Xanry picked up a bowling ball and handed it to Gerald before saying that.

Gerald received the bowling ball and walked forward, pretending to be unfamiliar with it. He did the same action as Xanry had done before. He then threw the bowling ball in his hand forward.

However, Gerald purposely threw it in an askew manner, and he did not hit a single pin.

“Ha! Ha! Ha!”

When Xanry saw that Gerald had failed to hit the pins, he soon burst into a roar of loud laughter all of a sudden.

“Mr. Crawford, it seems like you need to practice more. It’ll be fine after you practice a few times!”

Xanry pretended to be kind and reminded Gerald.

Gerald also did not bother about him. Instead, he continued to pick up another bowling ball and purposely practiced his skills.

Xanry was indeed stupid, for he had not seen through anything. He had absolutely not found out that Gerald was actually pretending.

If it was someone else who was professional, Gerald was afraid that they would have long seen through it and found that he definitely knew how to play bowling.

After a short while, Xanry looked toward Gerald again.

“Mr. Crawford, I see that you’ve practiced for so long. Why don’t we have a competition? Let’s have a round, shall we?”

Xanry suggested to Gerald.

Gerald knew that Xanry was about to start, and his true colors were about to be exposed.

As expected, that was Xanry's purpose. Xanry wanted to compete with Gerald and bully him fiercely in order to humiliate him.

Gerald had seen through everything, but he was unwilling to point that out.

Certainly, Gerald was not the kind of person who would not conform to that.

"Sure!"

Gerald directly agreed to do so. "How about this? We definitely need something at stake for a competition, right? What do you think about 150 dollars for a round?"

At that moment, Xanry looked toward Gerald and suggested to him. He had long planned a small scheme in his heart.

Gerald sneered inwardly. It seemed like Xanry was mad about money. He actually wanted 150 dollars for one round of bowling.

"Sure, no problem!"

After a pause, Gerald directly agreed to do so.

After all, money was nothing to Gerald. Besides, it was uncertain that he would lose terribly.

Everything was in his control.

“Monitor, don’t bully Juno’s boyfriend in such a terrible manner. If not, Juno will get angry!”

In that instant, a male classmate who was sitting at the side watching another’s misfortune teased Xanry. His tone was filled with ridicule for Gerald.

Gerald also did not care about those people. After all, everything would be known later.

Gerald would humiliate them vehemently, giving every one of them a soundless slap.

They wanted to bully him, but they did not cut the coat according to their clothes. Was it that easy to bully him?

“Come on! Mr. Crawford, we’ll take turns. Let’s see who has the highest score at the end!”

Xanry immediately described the rules to Gerald. He was rather impatient to bully Gerald vigorously.

Gerald nodded slightly without saying anything.

Soon, the machine had placed the pins nicely, and the competition started.

Xanry was the first to begin. He took a bowling ball, directly making a perfect arc in the air before the ball fell on the floor and rolled out.

After he threw the ball, he did not even spare it a glance. He was filled with confidence.

There was the crisp sound of a crash.

During the first round, Xanry had hit all of the pins, gaining ten points.

There were a total of ten pins, and one point would be rewarded for knocking down a pin.

“Wow!”

“Monitor, you’re so awesome!”

“That’s right! Monitor is just too handsome!”

Seeing that Xanry had knocked down all of the pins, the surrounding classmates cheered one after another, all of them praising him.

For a moment, Xanry was wallowing in the enjoyment of pleasure.

Next, it was Gerald’s turn. He got up and picked up a bowling ball. Gerald certainly would not directly show his true strength during that round. It was because the time had not come.

Hence, Gerald had to purposely fail to hit the pins no matter what.

After he had thought it over, he threw the ball out randomly. The bowling ball rolled in the lane swiftly before rolling out of the lane. The result was invalid, and he gained no points for that round.

“Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!”

That scene soon made everyone around that place burst into roars of laughter, and they thought that Gerald was just too weak.

However, Gerald did not bother about those people.

Gerald had done that on purpose, so he let them mock him all they wanted.

The more they mocked him now, the deeper the humiliation they would suffer later.

“Hmm... Mr. Crawford, it’s fine. Everyone makes mistakes!”

Xanry purposely endured it and refrained from laughing. He looked at Gerald and consoled him.

After that, as he was talking, he picked up the bowling ball. He started to throw the ball for the second round of the game.

The machine had just reset the pins nicely. The second round of the game had begun.

It was the same as before, and Xanry decisively threw out the bowling ball in his hand.

The bowling ball rolled on the lane, rolling toward the pins quickly.

Bang!

It hit the pins successfully.

However, the second round was not as smooth as the first round, and Xanry only knocked down seven pins, gaining seven points.

Actually, Xanry had done that purposely. He deliberately went easy on Gerald. If not, he would be deemed too cruel. Besides, Gerald was Juno’s boyfriend no matter what. He did not want Juno to get

angry at him later, thinking that he was entirely bullying Gerald.

“Your move, Mr. Crawford!” said Xanry as he turned to look at Gerald once he was done.

It was now the start of the second round, and Gerald knew that he couldn’t afford to obtain zero marks again or the gap between his score and Xanry’s would become too large for him to turn the game around later.

With that, Gerald picked a bowling ball up before slowly walking toward the lane.

The second he got into position, however, Gerald heard Xanry yell out from behind him, “Just make some bold toss, Mr. Crawford! It’s fine if you don’t hit anything, just take it as practice! After all, you need a lot more of it to even be able to take on me!”

As roars of laughter ensued, Gerald simply closed his eyes... Before slowly opening them again.

Taking a step forward, Gerald then tossed the bowling ball!

Rather than swerving to the side this time, the ball instead rolled straight for the pins, momentarily surprising Xanry and the others.

While the sound of bowling pins getting knocked over could be heard, Gerald only managed to hit five pins. With that in mind, he was now twelve marks behind Xanry.

Since there were six more rounds before the game ended—with the game consisting of eight rounds in total—Gerald felt that being twelve marks behind Xanry wasn’t really a particularly large difference. After all, he simply needed to get a higher final score than him to win.

“...Not bad, Mr. Crawford! I guess you really do have some talent to be able to hit five pins!” said Xanry

as he insincerely praised Gerald. Truth be told, the fact that Gerald had managed to hit five pins in the first place was truly vexing him. How lucky!

While that hit was certainly surprising, Xanry quickly summarized that Gerald still wasn't a threat to him. He'd definitely still be able to win and obtain that hundred and fifty dollars!

With that, their little contest resumed and the third round began.

Using his usual tactic, Xanry tossed the ball as easily as the first two rounds... and following the clattering of falling pins, only a single pin remained standing!

Since he had managed to gain nine points, Xanry now had a total of twenty-six points and this led those surrounding him to instantly cheer.

Even before Gerald made his move, however, he could already tell that that same crowd was going to jeer at him no matter what score he got. Still, it was clear to him that those spectators were simply fools fawning over Xanry. With that in mind, their jeers meant little to Gerald. Gerald hadn't even displayed his true capabilities yet.

Whatever the case was, Gerald then retrieved his third ball and tossed it skillfully without the slightest hesitation, a clear contrast to how he tossed his ball in the previous two rounds.

This was all according to plan, of course. Gerald had applied perfect amounts of force to his throws to display increasing amounts of strength and skill in each passing round. That way, not only would Xanry not be too quick to be suspicious of him, but he would also be able to ensure that he was making progress in the game.

If everything went smoothly, everyone would surely have a vastly different opinion of him by the end of the bowling match.

Regardless, as the ball rolled seamlessly on the lane, the familiar clatter of bowling pins could be heard... Gerald had managed to hit seven pins this time, and he now had twelve points, which meant that he was now only fourteen marks behind Xanry!

Seeing that Gerald had managed to hit even more pins this time, Xanry's expression turned even more unpleasant. To think that Gerald would be able to progress so quickly! He knew he couldn't afford to go easy on the youth anymore or their scores would just keep getting closer!

"...It appears that you're getting the hang of the game extremely quickly, Mr. Crawford! I guess I can't go easy on you anymore!" declared Xanry, making sure to make it obvious that he had been going easy on Gerald this entire time.

Upon hearing that, Gerald couldn't help but chuckle in his mind as he thought, 'I wonder who's truly going easy on who now...'

Whatever the case was, the fourth round soon began...

Since Xanry was up first, he got his ball before concentrating hard on the pins before him...

Once he was ready, he tossed the bowling ball toward the pins extremely swiftly! Xanry realized that he had made a miscalculation the second the ball hit the lane with a loud 'thud' before swerving right into the gutter! With that in mind, Xanry ended up getting no points for that round.

Seeing that, Xanry couldn't help but frown. To think that he would actually make such a mistake at the worst possible time! How dissatisfactory!

Gerald himself wasn't about to miss the chance to ridicule Xanry. Laughing aloud, Gerald then scoffed, "I guess you made a mistake just in time for me to catch up to you, Monitor! You have my thanks!"

Hearing that, Xanry grew immensely annoyed, though he didn't really have anything to retort. After all,

he was the one who had been careless.

Laughing bitterly in response, Xanry then replied, "...That's right! I guess you do have a chance now!"

While Gerald didn't say it out, in his mind, he was thinking, 'Go on pretending! You're still trying hard to put up an act even after I've given you a platform, huh?'

Now that it was Gerald's turn again, he figured that it was high time he started closing the gap between their scores even more. As long as he remained a few points behind Xanry, he wouldn't make his capabilities too obvious, and Xanry would surely continue being smug about it till the very last moment.

With that in mind, Gerald then got up and took yet another ball. Tossing it in one fluid motion, the ball rolled so steadily that by the time it got to the bowling pins, all ten of them ended up falling!

While gasps could be heard from the audience, Xanry's frown only deepened. Now that Gerald had twenty-two points, he was only four marks behind Xanry. If he wasn't careful, Gerald was surely going to surpass his score in the next round!

"Looks like I'm about to catch up to you, monitor!" said Gerald with a chuckle.

Forcing a laugh, the awkward Xanry then moved to take his fifth ball.

He now understood that due to him wanting to win so much in the previous round, he had gotten impatient, which led to his terrible performance. As the saying went, 'slow and steady wins the race'. With that in mind, Xanry made sure to calm himself before tossing his next shot.

Naturally, now that he was much more focused, Xanry was able to get a strike as well!

Seeing that, his classmates instantly began cheering once more!

“Hell yeah!”

“Awesome, monitor! You got a strike again!”

Now that he had returned to his normal performance, Xanry couldn't help but flash a smile. He was going to triumph over Gerald if it was the last thing he did!

Gerald, on the other hand, simply retained his poker face. Standing there calmly, it almost seemed like he didn't even care about Xanry's performance...

The truth was, however, that Gerald was cooking up a plan in his head. In his mind, he was thinking that instead of simply winning the competition by a landslide, wouldn't it annoy Xanry even more if he won with only a single point higher than Xanry?

Just as Gerald was thinking how interesting that outcome would be, his train of thought was cut short when Xanry scoffed, “It's your turn now, Mr. Crawford! Could it be that you're getting frightened of me?”

The fact that Gerald still hadn't made his move made Xanry delighted to no end. His humiliation earlier was definitely being redeemed now! Nodding slightly, Gerald then picked up another bowling ball before tossing it almost nonchalantly. Even so, he ended up getting yet another strike! How astonishing!

“I'm sorry, monitor! It appears that I've hit all of them again! I guess I've already mastered bowling!” replied Gerald as he smiled while looking at Xanry.

Currently, while Xanry was still ahead with thirty-six points, Gerald was only four points behind him. With only three rounds left, the competition was going to end soon. Who was going to be the victor?

“...A bit too early to celebrate, wouldn’t you say, Mr. Crawford? After all, we still have three rounds to decide the victor!” scoffed Xanry as he picked yet another bowling ball to start the fifth round.

After positioning himself, Xanry then aimed for the pins before swiftly tossing the ball toward them!

When tossing a bowling ball, the route the ball ended up landing in would alter the ball’s strength as well as the number of pins it could hit. With that in mind, not everyone could just hit a strike as they pleased. If they were really unlucky, then the bowling ball would even end up rolling into the gutter!

Even so, Xanry had made use of this knowledge—as well as his aiming skills—to perfectly calculate the direction and strength of the ball. With how straight the ball was now rolling, Xanry was more than certain that he had secured himself another strike!

As the ball crashed into the pins, everyone held their breath as they watched the ones at the sides wobble to and fro... Until eventually, only one pin remained standing! With nine pins knocked over, Xanry now had forty-five points in the bag!

Even so, Xanry felt that the results weren’t ideal. After all, now that he had missed one pin, Gerald was one point closer to catching up to him!

Regardless, it was now Gerald’s turn. As long as he managed to hit all the pins, there would only be a three-point difference between their scores!

Picking the ball up before Xanry even had a chance to taunt him, Gerald then casually tossed it down the lane... only to end up getting another strike! How stupefying!

Due to that, there was now only a three-point difference between the two. With only two rounds left in the game, the winner of the competition was soon to be announced...

Looking dead serious now, Xanry was worried out of his mind. After all, if he didn’t perform well in the

final two rounds, missing a single pin would result in Gerald winning the competition!

“Ah... Sorry monitor, but it seems that I got another strike! Lucky me!” said Gerald in an apologetic tone as he put on an innocent façade.

Hearing that, Xanry was so infuriated that he wanted to pummel Gerald to bits! However, he knew better than to do that. After all, that would surely make him look like a sore loser!

With that, the sixth round then began...

Picking the ball up, the worried Xanry couldn't help but quiver slightly. He knew that being defeated by Gerald would surely bring him immense humiliation, and understanding that only served to amplify his nervousness...

After slightly hesitating, Xanry then tossed the ball forward... However, it instantly rolled askew!

Seeing that, Xanry instantly knew that the results wouldn't look pretty. Fortunately, he still ended up hitting four pins. With that, he now had a total of forty-nine points.

“Oh no, it appears that you've made another mistake, monitor!” said Gerald who wasn't going to miss the chance to humiliate him.

Fuming mad, Xanry thought to himself, 'Like I'm blind... I can see that...! You don't have to rub it in!'

Whatever the case was, Xanry could now only hope that Gerald would also make a mistake. If that happened, then Xanry would still have one final chance to turn things around...

Unfortunately for him, Gerald wasn't about to grant him such a chance.

Immediately picking the bowling ball up, Gerald then walked toward the lane... Without even having to look where he was throwing, Gerald then confidently tossed it toward the pins.

Every dog had its day, and it was now Gerald's turn to do the mocking. After all, he was simply doing the same thing that Xanry had done to him in the first round.

Whatever the case was, as expected, no pins remained standing, signifying yet another strike from Gerald. With the scores being fifty-two against forty-nine now, Gerald's score had finally surpassed Xanry's...

With Gerald's turn over, the start of the seventh and final round began...

By this point, Xanry knew that he couldn't afford to mess up anymore. If he didn't land a strike, then he would surely lose to Gerald!

He was also worried that Gerald would get yet another strike... If that happened, then Xanry would still lose the competition, regardless of whether he managed to get that final strike or not... With that in mind, he could only pray that Gerald made a mistake in his final throw.

Shaking the thought off, Xanry then picked his final bowling ball before walking toward the lane...

As he took in a deep breath, Xanry heard as his classmates began cheering for him.

"Monitor, come on, you can do it!"

"Yeah! You'll definitely win, monitor!"

Upon hearing that, Xanry felt his confidence slowly return to him.

Now that he had recovered his strength, he glared at the pins before tossing the ball forward in a fluid motion!

Rolling in a straight line, the ball never swerved, and in the end, all ten pins were hit with a loud clatter!

“Strike!” yelled Xanry as he instantly jumped in joy and excitement. At the very least his final throw wasn’t a disappointment.

However, now that that was over, it was now Gerald’s turn...

Gerald’s performance in this final round would decide who won the battle. If Gerald got another strike, then it would officially be Xanry’s loss. However, if Gerald flubbed his roll, then it would be Xanry’s win...

Looking at Xanry’s score of fifty-nine, Gerald knew that he only had to hit eight pins in order to surpass Xanry by a single point. Of course, with how easily he had been getting strikes, hitting eight pins was nothing to Gerald.

With that, Gerald then picked his final bowling ball and adjusted the strength in his hands... before tossing the ball forward!

Swiftly rolling along the lane, the clattering of pins could soon be heard as the bowling ball’s strike left only two pins standing...

Just as Gerald had hoped for, he had managed to hit exactly eight pins, and with his score being sixty, he had managed to win against Xanry by exactly one point!

Xanry himself could only stand there, completely flabbergasted. To think that he would be defeated by

someone who hadn't even played bowling before!

Of course, Gerald was no stranger to bowling, but Xanry didn't know that, nor did he need to.

Regardless, despite winning, Gerald didn't want Xanry to get too embarrassed. After all, in the end, he was still Juno's monitor. With that said, Gerald knew he had to give Xanry at least some respect.

With that in mind, Gerald then smiled faintly before saying in a humble tone, "I guess I won, monitor! Sorry for that! However, I know how much of a pro you are in this game, so I'm pretty sure you deliberately lost to me, right?"

Upon hearing that, Xanry instantly caught on to what Gerald was trying to do. Since Gerald was granting him a chance to lessen his shame, Xanry was certainly not going to say no to that.

With that, Xanry then got his wallet before fishing a hundred and fifty dollars out to hand to Gerald.

Naturally, Gerald wasn't about to say no to that money. After all, he deserved it, and he wasn't embarrassed to take it.

Now that the game was over, Gerald then waved farewell to Xanry before heading back to Juno's side.

Seeing that he was finally back, Juno was prompted to ask, "What took you so long?"

"Well, I just played around for a while. Regardless, I got a bit tired so I'm back now!" explained Gerald with a faint smile.

Naturally, she believed Gerald's words. After all, there was no way she could've known about the incident between Gerald and Xanry. Then again, even if she was aware of it, she probably wouldn't have thought much about it. Hell, she would probably feel that Gerald had done well in teaching Xanry a

lesson.

Regardless, after a short while, both of them watched as Xanry walked over to them with a few bottles of wine and what appeared to be some dice in hand.

Sitting right before Gerald, Xanry then smiled before saying, "I'd say we didn't have that much of a good time earlier, Mr. Crawford. With that in mind, what say you and me play something new?"

Hearing that, Juno couldn't help but frown slightly as she looked at Xanry, wondering what he was up to.

Gerald himself could only contemptuously think, 'So, come back to look for more trouble after I defeated you earlier? How reluctant to lose are you? I guess the only way to drill it into you is by showing you the grim reality of things!'

Since Xanry was still pestering him, Gerald was no longer against hiding his true strength. If it was a game Xanry wanted, then Gerald was going to play properly to show Xanry just how powerless he truly was against him. Xanry was about to learn the hard way that Gerald wasn't someone who could be trifled with.

"Not a problem, monitor! Though I wonder what you're planning to play?" asked Gerald with a subtle smile after a slight pause.

Hearing Gerald's agreement, Xanry then placed the dice before Gerald before saying, "We're playing a game of dice. Have you played before?"

Nodding slightly, Gerald then replied, "Just a little!"

"That's great to hear! I won't be telling you the rules then. Regardless, what say we spice up the game by betting seventy-five dollars per round? I'm sure that that small amount won't be an issue for you. Besides, you already gained a hundred and fifty dollars from me earlier!" suggested Xanry, a hint of

annoyance in his tone. Since he had been humiliated so much earlier, he was surely going to get Gerald back for it this time.

He admitted that he had been a bit too careless earlier. Whatever the case was, he was a veteran when it came to dice. With that in mind, he definitely had a major advantage over Gerald this time around.

“No problem! I accept!” replied Gerald.

Upon hearing that, Juno—who had been sitting at the side—couldn’t help but look at Gerald with slight bewilderment.

Tugging on his sleeve, Juno then whispered, “Hey, don’t go acting all recklessly now, Gerald!”

“Don’t worry, I’m sensible enough to know my capabilities!” replied Gerald as he looked back at Juno.

“That’s right, Juno! You should believe in Mr. Crawford, you know?” added Xanry.

Hearing that, Juno chose to remain silent. After all, she, of all people, trusted that Gerald wasn’t one to act recklessly.

With that settled, Xanry then pushed the dice toward Gerald.

Picking them up, Gerald then began shaking the dice.

He was no stranger to the game, which explained his current confidence against Xanry. What more, he had a secret weapon that the others were unaware of, that being the fact that he could differentiate the points of the dice just by listening!

Naturally, this was a pretty exclusive skill that ordinary people could never hope to achieve. Gerald, however, was no ordinary person.

With all that in mind, it was pretty much set in stone that Gerald was going to be the victor before the game even began...With that, the duo then began shaking their dice around for a few seconds...

Once both of them stopped, Xanry immediately smiled as he said, "After you, Mr. Crawford! Make your guess!"

Hearing that, Gerald then declared, "Three sixes!"

"I see! Four sixes then!" shouted Xanry in response.

From what Gerald had been able to hear, he knew that Xanry definitely had two sixes. Gerald had two sixes himself, which was why he definitely couldn't open it.

Regardless, the only way to properly deal with Xanry would be to deliberately lose to him for a few rounds. Allowing Xanry to be smug the first few rounds would definitely make Gerald's eventual victory much sweeter.

With that in mind, Gerald then shouted, "Five fives!"

Upon hearing that, Xanry couldn't help but smile as he declared, "Open!"

Since Xanry had chosen to open Gerald's dice, Gerald naturally had to do so.

Looking at the results, the points of the dice didn't add up to five fives. Instead, there were only three fives, which meant that Gerald had lost this round.

Of course, the loss was calculated, and Gerald was still perfectly under control of the situation.

“Alas, it seems you’ve lost, Mr. Crawford!” said Xanry as he looked at the indifferent Gerald.

Gerald himself didn’t really care about the loss. After all, it was only seventy-five dollars. In a way, he was simply returning Xanry’s own money to him, and it was a detail that Gerald honestly found both hilarious and pathetic.

Regardless, after being handed the money, Xanry quickly took it from Gerald. It was almost as though he was worried that the money would disappear or something, and it clearly showed just how much Xanry cared about money.

Either way, now that he had finally won some cash, Xanry immediately said, “Shall we continue, Mr. Crawford?”

“Fine by me!” replied Gerald as both of them began shaking their dice again...

The second they stopped shaking, Xanry instantly said, “Since you lost in the previous round, you’ll start first, Mr. Crawford!”

Nodding and knowing for a fact—with the aid of his keen hearing—that Xanry had two threes and three fives, Gerald deliberately answered wrongly to let Xanry win again by declaring, “Three fives!”

Gerald himself had the exact opposite digits, with him having two fives and three threes.

Whatever the case was, Xanry then shouted, “Four fours!”

Naturally, it was a number that neither of them had.

To be quite frank, Gerald really wanted to open Xanry's dice now, but he refrained. After all, he didn't want Xanry to lose that quickly. In order to make Xanry's defeat really sting, Gerald was going to allow Xanry to wallow in victory for a few rounds first...With that in mind, after a brief pause, Gerald then declared, "Five fours!"

"Open!" yelled Xanry almost instantaneously.

Rather than feeling surprised that Xanry would choose to open now, Gerald instead felt delighted. After all, he had been waiting for Xanry to do so. Everything was simply going to plan...

Regardless, Gerald then revealed his dice for Xanry to see.

Upon seeing that he had won again, the clearly sarcastic Xanry said in an apologetic tone, "Apologies, Mr. Crawford, but it appears that you've lost again! Looks like you'll be forking out more money to me!"

It didn't take a genius to know that Xanry was already drunk with power. Xanry clearly thought that Gerald was no match against him in this game.

"You win some, you lose some!" replied Gerald in a casual tone as he handed another seventy-five dollars to the overjoyed Xanry.

Seeing that Gerald had already lost a hundred and fifty dollars, Juno quickly looked at Gerald before muttering slightly worriedly, "Gerald, just forget about the game and let's leave already...!"

While seventy-five dollars was nothing to them, if Gerald continued losing, his monetary losses would surely stack up to dangerous amounts...

Chuckling in response, Gerald then said, "Don't worry, Juno! The show has only begun! Besides, I haven't lost a single cent! I won a hundred and fifty dollars from him earlier, so all I've done is return his own money!"

Hearing that, Juno simply chose to remain silent as the competition between Gerald and Xanry resumed.

Now that he had returned all of Xanry's money to him, it was high time Gerald revealed his true strength. It was finally time to go all out!

With that, both of them began shaking their dice again.

The second he saw Gerald stop shaking his dice, Xanry immediately said, "After you, Mr. Crawford!"

From what Gerald was able to hear, Xanry's dice showed four fours and one three. As for his own dice, Gerald had four twos and one five.

With that in mind, Gerald then declared, "Three twos!"

Hearing that, Xanry yelled, "Three fives!"

"Open!" shouted Gerald, no longer planning to allow Xanry to win.

Upon hearing that, Xanry was momentarily stunned. To think that Gerald would choose to open his dice!

Unable to do anything about it, Xanry then opened his dice at the same time Gerald did...

"Oh my... It appears that I only have one five! Sorry monitor, but it seems you've lost!" said Gerald in a

calm tone as he looked at Xanry.

Finding it hard to believe that he had lost, the unwilling Xanry then fished out seventy-five dollars and handed it to Gerald while saying, "...Fine! You win some, you lose some! Here's the money!"

To think that he had to return the money to Gerald so quickly!

Either way, Gerald was naturally not done with Xanry yet. He wasn't going to let Xanry off with a mere seventy-five-dollar loss!

With that, Gerald then asked, "So, how about it, monitor? Do you still wish to continue?"

Now that he wasn't holding back anymore, Gerald naturally wanted to continue the game.

Not finding it odd that Gerald suddenly looked much more interested in the game, Xanry simply replied, "Of course we'll continue! After all, we've only played a few rounds! I won't be going easy on you after this, Mr. Crawford!"

Hearing that same sentence again, Gerald found himself getting increasingly fed up with those words. Xanry was way too confident for his own good. However, the more confident he was, the more arrogant he became, and when that happened, Gerald knew for a fact that things wouldn't end well for him.

With that, both of them quickly began shaking their dice again.

While Gerald only shook his dice for around two seconds, Xanry continued shaking his own dice for quite a while. Even so, Gerald was still able to easily discern what Xanry's dice were. After all, no matter how long he shook his dice, Xanry wouldn't be able to escape Gerald's keen hearing. Still, the fact that Xanry thought that shaking his dice longer could confuse Gerald was honestly laughable.

When Xanry finally stopped rolling, he then declared, "It's finally my turn to start first, Mr. Crawford!"

Though it had been a while since Gerald had last played, he clearly remembered that the one who had lost had the right to shout first. Then again, so what if Xanry could shout first? It was impossible for him to win in the end. Shaking the dice longer was pretty much only a waste of energy.

Regardless, Gerald was quickly able to tell that Xanry's dice showed three sixes, one five, and one four. Since his dice rolls this round wasn't all that great, his chances of winning had become even slimmer than before.

Following that, Xanry then shouted, "Three twos!"

Momentarily caught by surprise, Gerald hadn't expected Xanry to actually shout a number that he didn't even have in his roll. It almost seemed like he was trying to trap him... Of course, Gerald wasn't about to let Xanry have his way.

With that, he chose not to open Xanry's dice just yet. If he did, it would just be too obvious.

Instead, Gerald shouted out the numbers of his own dice, that being, "Three fives!"

Hearing that, Xanry was definitely not going to open Gerald's dice. After all, the possibility of having three fives was simply too low.

After that, Xanry then yelled, "Four fours!"

"Open!" declared Gerald. Since Gerald didn't have a single four, if he didn't open now, how much longer would he have to wait?

While Xanry found himself stunned, he quickly snapped out of it before opening his dice...

Due to Gerald not having any fours and Xanry having one, it was evident that Xanry had lost this round as well.

To think that such results would turn up... He truly had brought ruin upon himself again...

Watching as Xanry's expression soured, Gerald apologetically said, "Sorry monitor, guess I win again!"

Though Xanry was vexed out of his mind when he heard that, there was nothing he could do. After all, both Juno and Ruth had been watching them play this entire time. It was impossible for him to go back on his own bet.

With that, the resigned Xanry could only return the remaining seventy-five dollars that he had just won back to Gerald.

As the saying went, 'things would always return to their rightful owners'.

With the hundred and fifty dollars back, Gerald smiled as he turned to face Xanry while saying, "I think we shouldn't play any longer, monitor! It's not good to gamble this much!"

While his words were kind, Gerald was well aware that saying that would only further provoke Xanry into playing more.

"...Of course we'll continue playing! I've only lost a hundred and fifty dollars, you know? I'll definitely win that amount back later!" replied Xanry in a confident tone.

Hearing that, Gerald was instantly delighted as he thought, 'To think that he's still trying to intimidate me! Since it's come to this, don't blame me for taking more of your money!'

Some people just needed to be persistently and mercilessly dealt with for the point to finally get across their thick skulls.

Regardless, the two of them then promptly started their next round.

Throughout the process of shaking their dice, Xanry kept a close eye on Gerald. To his annoyance, Gerald didn't appear to have any tricks up his sleeve. Still, Xanry simply had a feeling that Gerald was different, though he couldn't pinpoint what made Gerald so special...

Whatever the case was, after a while, the two of them stopped shaking their dice at the same time.

This time, Gerald had four twos and a single one. In the game's terms, such results were known as 'leopard' since so many of the dice yielded the same value. Xanry, on the other hand, had four threes and a single two.

Looking at the value of his own dice, Xanry couldn't help but smile confidently.

Seeing that, Gerald then said, "Come on, monitor! After you!"

"Four twos!" declared Xanry, evidently still trying to frame Gerald. Unfortunately, the only way he could succeed with his plan was by getting defeated by Gerald again this round.

Naturally, Gerald was no fool so he simply yelled out Xanry's points, that being, "Four threes!"

Upon hearing that, Xanry couldn't help but frown slightly. How could Gerald have known his exact points?

Quickly shaking the thought off—figuring that Gerald had just yelled out some random numbers—Xanry then shouted, "Five twos!"

“Oh? I’ll add one more then! Six twos!” yelled Gerald in return.

Upon hearing that, Xanry was stunned. To think that Gerald would be this quick to act!

Regardless, now that Gerald had called for six, the situation was getting more and more dangerous. If he continued shouting, he was afraid that Gerald would eventually open his dice. With that in mind, Xanry could only choose to open Gerald’s dice first.

“...Fine! I’m opening yours! I don’t believe that you could have six twos!” grumbled Xanry as he revealed his dice before staring at Gerald confidently.

Unfortunately for him, nothing went according to Xanry’s plans.

“Oh my, I’m truly sorry, monitor! It appears that I really have six twos! What more, not only do I have six of them, but I also have a ‘leopard’!” declared Gerald as he smugly looked at Xanry.

How... How was this possible?! It was truly stupefying to Xanry.

Who would’ve guessed that Gerald would get a leopard! No wonder Gerald had shouted that out so confidently! He had calculated all the odds extremely carefully!

Whatever the case was, this fact truly made Xanry suffer a great loss.

“...Fine! You win some, you lose some!” grumbled Xanry as he took another seventy-five dollars out from his wallet, unable to play any tricks.

Taking the money, Gerald then handed it to Juno before saying with a smile, “Hold on to it for me, will

you, Juno? After all, it's probably rare that monitor is this generous!"

Upon hearing that, Xanry was instantly infuriated. While he was filled with resentment, the truth remained that he had lost, so he couldn't just burst into anger. What more, if he flew into a rage now, Xanry was worried that the others would start claiming that he wasn't wealthy enough to play the game, and that was a form of humiliation he never wanted to experience.

He had just lost two hundred and twenty-five dollars. It wasn't much to him, so he could surely still go on...!

Believing that Xanry wouldn't want to continue playing after suffering so many losses, Gerald then looked at him before asking, "Are you going to play more, monitor?"

"But of course! Let's resume!" declared Xanry. At his current state, it was clear that Xanry had the temperament typical of a gambler. Unless he won against Gerald, he wouldn't be able to rest easy.

Not that Gerald was complaining, of course. He wanted to see how much more Xanry could take.

"Very well then, monitor! However, since you suggested the previous game, I think it's high time I suggested my own. What do you say we switch it up a little?" asked Gerald.

Upon hearing that, Xanry—who was sure that he would be able to defeat Gerald no matter what game he wanted to play—then said, "I accept! Do share the details of the game!"

"It's quite simple, really. We'll both have five dice each, and we'll have to guess the points of our opponent's dice. For example, if you guess close to the number of points I have, then you'll win. With my loss, I'll have to pay you the difference in points between the actual points and the amount you guessed, with each point symbolizing fifteen dollars. What do you think?" explained Gerald.

Finding Gerald's game intriguing, Xanry quickly replied, "Agreed! Let's go with this then!"

For a person who enjoyed gambling, they'd surely end up getting addicted extremely quickly with such high-risk high-reward games. If it wasn't already obvious enough, Xanry was such a person, and he was truly unfortunate that Gerald was his opponent.

Regardless, both of them quickly picked their dice up and began shaking...

The second they stopped, Gerald turned to face Xanry before saying, "After you!"

Hearing that, Xanry instantly went with a high value, stating, "Twenty-five points!"

Gerald himself replied, "A high guess! Well, I guess that you have nineteen!"

Though Gerald knew the exact points Xanry currently had, he couldn't just reveal that number. While Gerald had to always make sure he was a few points above or below Xanry's score, he was certain that he'd still be able to take Xanry down.

Whatever the case was, now that the values had been shouted out, both of them displayed their dice for each other to see... revealing twenty points on Gerald's side and sixteen on Xanry's side.

This meant that Gerald had won this round since Gerald's guess was only three points short of what Xanry had rolled whereas Xanry was five points short.

Smiling, Gerald then looked at Xanry before saying, "Well, guess I've won! Time to pay up, monitor!"

Now feeling gloomier than before, Xanry realized that Gerald must be experienced in the game. It certainly explained why Gerald had chosen this specific game to play with him.

Still, now that they were already in the middle of the game, there was no way he was going to suddenly ask for it to stop. Doing so would only end up humiliating him, and for Xanry, his dignity and pride were above all else. With that in mind, he handed yet another seventy-five dollars to Gerald.

While it was true that he was rich, his heart still ached to have to hand Gerald that money. After all, though the money he had lost was nothing particularly noteworthy to him, the fact remained that he hadn't won a single cent from Gerald. Xanry had simply been losing money this entire time!

Gerald himself couldn't really be blamed. After all, Xanry was the one who had wanted to continue playing this entire time. Xanry was simply reaping what he had sown for continually trying to offend Gerald.

Regardless, now that this round was over, Gerald then looked at Xanry before asking, "So, one more round, monitor?"

After suffering so many losses, Xanry certainly didn't want to stick around anymore.

By this point, he knew that Gerald had some hidden ability that had been allowing him to win so many times in a row. Xanry had also become aware that Gerald had simply been pretending to be weak this entire time. With that in mind, it made sense that him constantly looking down on Gerald would lead to such an outcome!

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Chuckling in response, Xanry then smiled before saying, "Before that, I'd like to head to the washroom first!"

"Sure thing!" replied Gerald with a nod. While he knew that Xanry was trying to escape, Gerald didn't feel the need to expose him.

Whatever the case was, Xanry then got up and quickly left for the washroom.

Now that he had finally managed to escape from Gerald's evil grasp, there was no way in hell that he was going to dare offend Gerald anymore.

Soon enough, the classmate party ended smoothly and Gerald drove home together with Juno...

The second they stepped into her house, Juno instantly smiled as she turned to look at Gerald before saying, "You've teased Xanry so much today, Gerald!"

Laughing heartily in response, Gerald then replied, "He's at fault for offending me in the first place! I certainly couldn't just let him off after he did that, could I? Besides, you're happy that I teased him too, no?"

Upon hearing that, Juno nodded before delightedly saying, "Of course I'm happy! That guy's been pestering me since my university days, you know? At long last, someone humiliated him!"

Since Gerald had humiliated him so much, she was sure that Xanry wouldn't pester her ever again. That was one troublesome person done with...

At that moment, a tiny creak was heard...

Turning to face the door that had opened, the duo watched as Ray slowly walked out...

Upon seeing them, he then quickly jogged toward them while saying, "Mr. Crawford! Miss Zorn! You're back!"

"We are, but why are you still up, Ray?" asked Juno.

"I... I've been waiting for you to return! Old Flint sent you something!" explained Ray.

"What? He did? What did he send over?" asked Gerald curiously.

Upon hearing that, Ray re-entered his room before returning with a box and handing it to Gerald.

"It's this unopened box with a letter attached to it! I'm guessing that Old Flint wrote the letter!" explained Ray.

Hearing that, Gerald then took the box and quickly opened it... only to reveal a perfume bag inside that constantly emitted a faint, pleasant smell...

"...That smells so wonderful! I wonder why Old Flint sent you a perfume bag of all things..." muttered Ray.

While the gift was a pleasant surprise to both Ray and Juno, they quickly realized that Gerald was instead, frowning. Did the perfume bag symbolize something...?

Not even bothering to reply to Ray's statement, Gerald then quickly began reading through Old Flint's letter... and by the time he was done, his frown was much, much deeper than before.

Seeing how furrowed Gerald's brows now were, Ray—who had never seen Gerald show such an expression before—couldn't help but ask in a concerned tone, "What's wrong, Mr. Crawford? What happened? Your expression looks so unpleasant!"

"Indeed! What did Old Flint say, Gerald?" asked Juno.

"...First of all, this perfume bag... It's called ghost-luring perfume, and as its name suggests, it's used to lure ghosts. Moving on to the letter, Old Flint apparently wants to head to a place called Grimhelm to investigate some secrets regarding vampires. Though he's asking me if I'm willing to go with him, since he sent me this perfume bag, I'm sure he means business. After all, I told him to only send this particular kind of perfume bag over if major issues came up!"

After hearing Gerald's explanation, both of them finally got the whole story. As it turned out, the perfume bag really did symbolize something.

"...Still... couldn't the 'major issue' be a good affair?" asked Ray.

Shaking his head, Gerald then replied, "Unfortunately, I've heard tales of Grimhelm before as well. It's an extremely vicious place, so the fact that he's gone there must mean that he's bumped into some trouble."

Gerald also knew that Old Flint was wise enough not to send such a perfume bag over under normal circumstances. He would've only posted it when he was in urgent need of help...

"...I see! Then... When are we leaving?"

"We leave at nine tomorrow morning!" declared Gerald, knowing how urgent the situation was.

Following that, he turned to face Ray and Juno before instructing, "Ray, Juno, go wake Nori up and detail her on all this. Once that's done, start packing up. I'll be needing you three to follow me there!"

With how serious the matter was, Gerald needed all the help he could get. After all, with every additional person they had, the more power their party would possess.

Hearing that, Juno then replied, “Got it!”

Ray had no objections either, so the duo quickly parted ways with Gerald.

After that, all four of them quickly began packing up and readying themselves for the trip tomorrow morning...

While Gerald finished packing relatively early, he naturally had a restless night...

By early morning, all four of them were already up, and after cleaning themselves and having their breakfast, the party of four then set off.

With Ray being the driver, the party then drove all the way to the highway entrance—which took about half an hour—near the sea. According to the meeting time in the letter, Old Flint should be waiting for them there by then...

True enough, upon arriving at the highway entrance, all four of them saw an old person wearing a black windbreaker—as well as a black hat—sitting by the roadside, a sandalwood scepter in hand. It wasn’t hard to discern that that was none other than Old Flint. With that, Gerald then told Ray to stop the car next to him.

The second the car stopped, Gerald stepped out before respectfully greeting, “Old Flint!”

Nodding slightly with a grunt, the old man then got into the shotgun seat with Gerald’s help.

With that done, Gerald then told Ray that he would be driving next.

It wasn't as though Ray had bad driving skills or anything, but the fact remained that only Gerald and Old Flint knew where their destination was. With that in mind, it would be better that Gerald drove rather than having to point out the directions to Ray throughout the entire journey.

Before leaving, Gerald made sure to ask, "Is there anyone else joining us, Old Flint?"

Shaking his head slightly, Old Flint then leaned against his seat, not saying a word...

Since he had a pair of sunglasses on, nobody truly knew whether his eyes were open or closed.

Regardless, seeing that he wasn't going to get a reply, Gerald then stepped on the accelerator, driving straight into the highway...

"It'll be about ten hours before we get to our destination. The three of you can get some rest if you want to. After all, we woke up pretty early!" suggested Gerald.

Hearing that, all three of them nodded. After all, there was not much else to do on the highway unless they came across any rest areas. With that, it wasn't long before all three of Gerald's companions dozed off...

When that happened, there was complete silence in the car. After all, Gerald was driving attentively whereas Old Flint remained as silent as ever.

Though such a situation would surely be tiresome for regular people—since a ten-hour drive was rather long—, it was a rather easy affair for Gerald. He wasn't tired in the least...

It was at around eleven that night when Gerald and the others finally arrived at the Emerald Realm. The

vampires' territory was an old forest located on an ancient mountain there, and since ancient times, few had ventured into the forest to meet them...

Fortunately for the party, there were still some operating hotels and inns in the vicinity. With that in mind, the group of five could finally settle down and get some proper rest...

After booking some rooms, he allowed everyone to head to their respective rooms to get some well-deserved sleep. After all, they needed to be fully rested before officially entering vampire territory early the next morning...

By dawn, all of them checked out early and immediately began driving toward the old forest in the mountains...

After about forty minutes of driving, the car finally came to a halt at the foot of the mountain. Since the car couldn't be driven any further, they had no other choice but to continue forward on foot.

Once they got their luggage, they began their journey up the mountain...

As they were walking, Ray couldn't help but declare, "...I'm not sure about the rest of you, but the air here is amazingly fresh! It feels rather nice to be away from the hustle and bustle of the city!"

The others knew what he meant. After all, the environment here was definitely fresher compared to the city's. Aside from the crisp air, they were also surrounded by the rejuvenating aura of the plants around them...

Regardless, after walking for about half an hour, the five of them eventually arrived at a village.

The village itself was built by the local vampires, and since they lived in such seclusion, their customs were naturally different.

With that in mind, the second the surrounding vampires noticed Gerald and his party's presence, they instantly stopped whatever they were doing. As all the vampires stood up and stared vigilantly at the group, a man wearing a leather jacket walked up to Gerald, glaring at the youth as he asked, "Who are you people?"

Naturally stopping in their tracks, Gerald then smiled subtly as he replied, "Greetings! We're merchants!"

"Hah! A merchant, you say? Look, I've seen tons of people like you, so cut the act already! Tell me, are you here for the treasure in the forest?" sneered the man.

Frowning slightly upon hearing that, Gerald couldn't help but think that the vampires were a bit more difficult to deal with than he had initially anticipated.

After a slight pause, he then ordered, "Ray, bring the food out!"

Upon hearing that, Ray immediately took all the food out of his backpack before handing some to Gerald.

Taking the food, Gerald then handed them to the leather-coated man before saying, "We really are merchants! We're here in exchange for some goods and local specialties! If you still don't believe us, come examine our wares!"

Of course, Gerald was saying this to avoid the man from further being suspicious of them.

After hearing Gerald's words and seeing the food, the man lowered his guard slightly before taking the food that Gerald had handed out to him.

Even as the leather-coated man was still inspecting the food, the other vampires were already rushing toward Gerald and his group.

While Gerald and the others quickly became the most welcome people in the village, it also caused their food supply to rapidly diminish as the villagers readily traded in gold for the wares.

Naturally, this made Ray, Nori, and Juno slightly worried. After all, if they had no food left, what were they going to eat when they ventured deeper into the old forest?

At that moment, a gruff voice could be heard shouting, “Step aside!”

Following that, everyone watched as a fat man fumbled forward with a few shabbily-dressed subordinates following behind him.

“Oho! Outsiders, hmm? What good things have you brought over?” Looking at the large-bellied man—who was staring at Gerald and his group—, Gerald already knew that he was trouble. More accurately, he felt that the fat man was a bandit and a plain bully in the village.

While Gerald wasn’t too keen on getting into contact with him or his subordinates, he still put on a smile as he replied, “It’s just some food, but all of it has already been exchanged and taken by the villagers!”

Hearing that, the big-bellied man then raised his head before declaring, “Listen here! I’m called Fane and I’m the boss of this village! Since you’ve come to my village, you should hand us something as a welcome gift! Otherwise, it’ll be hard for me to allow you to stay here!”

Upon hearing that, Gerald instantly knew that Fane was merely a gangster trying to blackmail them for money. While the threats would surely fool the more gullible people, Gerald was experienced with people like Fane. With that in mind, he wasn’t about to allow Fane to take advantage of them.

Regardless, before Gerald could even reply, Fane—who had his gaze fixed on Juno and Nori for a while

now—revealed a sinister smile before saying, “Oho, those two beauties at the back look rather nice!”

Hearing that, Gerald instantly stepped in between him and the two girls before staring straight in the eye at Fane while saying, “Sir, we’re merchants who are here to do business! Now that we’ve sold all our goods, we should leave!”

Just as he signaled for Juno and Nori to begin leaving, Gerald heard as Fane angrily shouted, “Stop right there! Did I say you could leave? I told you, if you wish to leave, you have to leave something behind! Otherwise, don’t even dream of getting out of the village!”

When he heard that, Gerald’s expression instantly soured. Looking at Fane—who was glaring all high and mightily at him—Gerald was pretty sure that the fat man wasn’t about to take him seriously anytime soon.

With that in mind, Gerald could only think, ‘How absolutely shameless... To think that he so badly wants to stand against me! Well, that’s just great! I won’t hesitate to deal with you too, then! Daring to even have ulterior motives against me... You truly are courting death!’

“Then, what exactly do you wish for me to leave behind?” asked Gerald in a casual tone.

Laughing out loud, Fane then declared, “You can either hand over all your money or leave those two women behind!” scoffed Fane as he snorted while looking lustfully at Juno and Nori.

“And if I’m reluctant to do either?” replied Gerald.

“You mother*cker! Are you playing dumb now? If you want to be this defiant, I’ll just order my men to ruin you!” growled Fane.

Before Fane could say anything else, however, he quickly found himself flying backward!

Naturally, this was because Gerald had made a move.

Not only was Fane vulgar toward him, but he even had such ulterior motives on Juno and Nori! The combination of the two was definitely enough to warrant being taught a lesson by Gerald.

Regardless, after seeing their boss getting beaten up, Fane's subordinates instantly rushed toward Gerald to avenge him.

Of course, Gerald simply countered their assaults with lightning-fast kicks without the slightest hesitation.

As all of them were promptly taken out in a single hit, Gerald couldn't help but feel that they were all idiots for even daring to look for trouble with him when they were so weak.

Ray and the others, on the other hand, simply watched the scene play out in silence. After all, they knew that nothing bad would happen to them with Gerald there.

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Soon enough, night fell and the entire area was completely engulfed in darkness. With how silent it was, the crackling of the bonfire—that Gerald and his party had started in the yard and were currently sitting around—was crisp as day...

With the presence of a very large piece of meat for dinner—that was currently cooking over the bonfire—, it was evident that Gerald had saved some food for a rainy day. Gerald had made sure to keep some rations in his own bag, anticipating the possibility of the villagers exchanging all of the food in Ray's backpack.

Due to how large the meat was, all five of them were sufficiently full by the time dinner was over.

With their bellies now filled, Ray couldn't help but ask in a slightly worried tone, "...Do you think Fane and his gang will come looking for trouble with us tonight, Mr. Crawford?"

"Don't worry, we'll just take turns being on guard tonight. You can sleep first, and after two hours, we'll switch places. That way, nobody will be able to sneak up on us!" said Gerald.

Even if Fane wasn't present, Gerald would've still suggested for the same thing to be done. After all, they were currently in unfamiliar territory. With that in mind, they needed to be on guard at all times to prevent getting sneak attacked.

Inclusive of Old Flint, Gerald was more worried about Juno and Nori's safety. He swore to himself that he wouldn't allow either of them to suffer from any injuries or get hurt during this journey...

Regardless, Ray was naturally not against Gerald's suggestion, and he nodded in agreement.

It was late into the night when Juno and Nori finally fell asleep, their shoulders leaning against each other. Old Flint himself could be seen meditating at the side while Ray eventually dozed off as he leaned against a pillar.

As for Gerald, he sat before the bonfire, keeping a lookout for danger while occasionally looking at the sky...

From where he sat, the night sky looked utterly picturesque. Soon enough, a bright crescent moon—that had earlier been blocked by clouds—revealed itself along with countless dazzling stars...

Due to all the neon lights and street lamps in cities, such beautiful sights were impossible to enjoy in urban areas. With that in mind, the natural beauty—that could only be witnessed out here in the wilderness—would surely be able to refresh anyone's mind...

Whatever the case was, the night was uneventful and ended peacefully.

It appeared that despite Fane and his gang's rashness, they knew their limitations well. After all, that group of bullies hadn't caused trouble for Gerald and his party at all that night.

Even so, Gerald was abruptly awoken early that morning when he heard a racket nearby.

With that, the awakened Gerald—who had fallen asleep at dawn since he figured that nobody would be dumb enough to attack them in daylight—instantly ran out to have a look.

Shortly after, he came across a group of villagers who were discussing something while standing around a well. With how unpleasant their expressions were, Gerald could only assume that something bad had happened.

When the villagers noticed that Gerald was curiously walking toward them, they quickly surrounded him. Before Gerald could even ask what they were doing, one of the villagers pointed at him before asking, "Was it you?"

Raising a slight brow in his bewilderment, Gerald then replied, "...Was it me, what? What happened?"

Upon hearing that, the villager then harrumphed before furiously retorting, "Was it you who killed Fane? After all, he offended you yesterday!"

After the angry villager said that, the other villagers quickly pointed at the well, prompting Gerald to walk over and look down...

The second he did, Gerald was instantly greeted by the sight of a massive floating corpse... With how fat it was, he had no doubt that the body belonged to Fane...

Stunned that Fane would die so suddenly—and be found dead in the well of all places—Gerald then faced the villagers before asking, "How... Did he die?"

"...What do you mean, how did he die? Are you seriously pretending to be surprised that his body is here? You're the only one here who has a grudge against him, you know? Who else could've killed him?" blamed another villager. "Look, I didn't even leave the house! How could I have killed him?" explained Gerald.

While that was the truth, he knew the villagers weren't going to buy it so easily. With that in mind, the best way to clear things out would be by investigating how Fane truly died.

Still, Fane's death certainly explained why he and his gang hadn't caused Gerald and his party any trouble the previous night.

Though Fane was definitely a villainous character that deserved retribution sooner or later, Gerald had to admit that his death was a bit too untimely.

Whatever the case was, Gerald then added, "...Look, before we start pointing fingers, let's just get the corpse up first to see how he really died!"

Hearing that, the villagers couldn't argue with Gerald's logic, so they began tugging his corpse up.

The second the fat corpse was out in the open, everyone saw that his face had been completely ruined. With how badly his face had been clawed up, Fane barely had any notable facial features left.

Squatting down to get a closer look at Fane's corpse, Gerald eventually found a deep gash in Fane's neck. With that in mind, Gerald deduced that he had died from blood loss.

Once he got back to his feet, Gerald then turned to look at the villagers before displaying his hands while saying, "From what I can see, whatever killed Fane had sharp claws. I mean, just take a good look at his mangled face! There's a deep gash in his neck too that could've only been inflicted by extremely sharp claws! With that in mind, I couldn't have been the killer!"

Realizing that Gerald's statement made sense, the villagers quickly accepted that he wasn't the killer. However, if that was the case, then who was the murderer? What happened the previous night? Also, why weren't Fane's subordinates with him? All these were still mysteries...

All of a sudden, everyone suddenly heard a young voice shouting, "S-something terrible has happened! D-dead bodies!"

Turning around to see the nervous boy who was running toward them, the villagers exchanged glances before one of them said, "Calm yourself. What happened?"

"F-Fane's underlings... All of them have died at their home!" exclaimed the terrified youth.

Upon hearing that, everyone instantly began trembling. Nobody could've seen this coming...

Regardless, Gerald and the villagers then hurried over to where Fane's subordinates were staying. Upon

arriving at the shabby-looking yard, everyone could see their dead bodies lying all over the yard. Upon closer inspection, all of them had died the same way Fane had, with bloody gashes on their necks. With that in mind, Gerald knew that the same person had done the deed.

“What on earth could have caused all this to happen...?”

“Indeed... could... could the ghost have come out of the forest?”

“T-that’s impossible!”

Though the villagers were now theorizing the current events among themselves, Gerald didn’t bother about them. Instead, he quickly returned to where they were staying, only to find that Ray and the others had awoken.

Seeing that Gerald had returned, Ray was prompted to ask, “Where did you head off so early in the morning, Mr. Crawford?”

Ignoring Ray’s question, Gerald instead turned to face Old Flint before saying, “Old Flint, please, come with me!”

Upon hearing that, the old man quickly followed Gerald out.

Curious, Ray followed both of them out as well. While Ray had no idea what was happening, judging from Gerald’s expression, he knew that it was a serious incident.

It wasn’t long before the trio arrived at the well.

Pointing at Fane’s corpse—that was now lying on the ground—Gerald then said, “Please have a look at this corpse, Old Flint! Something attacked him yesterday before tossing him down the well!”

Upon seeing the corpse, the shocked Ray then shouted in disbelief, "...Isn't that Fane, Mr. Crawford? We just met him yesterday! How could he die so abruptly?"

Not even bothering to answer Ray's question, Gerald simply kept his gaze on Old Flint.

Old Flint himself simply stared at the corpse, clearly analyzing it. After a short period, he then said, "...This is the work of feral vampires!"

"Feral vampires?" repeated Gerald, surprised by Old Flint's answer.

"Indeed. Only their kind would have such sharp claws that could easily kill. What more, if you pay closer attention, you'll be able to see bite marks on his neck! It can only signify that his blood had been sucked up!" explained Old Flint.

"So, what you're saying is that there are feral vampires in the forests around us? Why weren't we attacked last night instead?" asked Gerald.

Seeing that Gerald was rather doubtful about his claim, Old Flint then replied, "That's because the feral ones are afraid of fire. We had a bonfire burning last night, remember? That's why the feral vampires didn't go after us. My guess is that this Fane person must have gone out in the middle of the night. Seeing that they couldn't target us, the feral vampires must have gone after him instead!"

Old Flint's deduction made sense to Gerald, so he bought his words. To think that all this had been the work of feral vampires!

Whatever the case was, Old Flint then added, "We mustn't linger around for any longer. We have to set off immediately!"

Watching as Old Flint then turned to leave, Gerald took one final glance at Fane's corpse before following Old Flint together with Ray.

Once they were back home, they quickly packed their stuff and silently left the village. After all, if the villagers knew that they were leaving under such short notice, they'd surely attempt to stop Gerald and his party.

Regardless, after walking for a bit, they eventually managed to enter the old forest deep in the mountain...

Now enshrouded by trees, the group remained vigilant as they slowly proceeded.

While walking on, Ray couldn't help but ask, "...What do feral vampires even look like, Mr. Crawford?"

Hearing that, Gerald wasn't too sure how to reply. After all, he had never personally met a feral vampire either. With that, he then turned to look at Old Flint before saying, "Not a clue. Do you know what they look like, Old Flint?"

"Feral vampires have particularly sharp fingernails that can easily tear through human skin, not unlike a predatory animal's claws. They're also reliant on and enjoy drinking blood, so much so that they have a keen sense toward blood!" explained Old Flint.

Now understanding that they required blood to live, Ray then asked, "...If they're as scary as you say, then why are we even looking for them?"

Hearing that, neither Gerald nor Old Flint responded. Only Gerald and the old man were allowed to know the reason for now, and until they arrived at the vampires' territory, the remaining trio wasn't going to get a clear explanation about their mission from either of them.

Until then, the trio simply had to focus on helping Gerald and Old Flint remain vigilant against surprise

feral vampire attacks.

Not long after, the group was able to hear rather loud rustling from within the trees. Stopping in their tracks, Gerald and the others immediately heightened their vigilance!

Seconds later, a group of people—who were dressed in clothing that made them blend well with their surroundings—rushed out from the trees before quickly surrounding Gerald’s party! “...Who are these people, Mr. Crawford?” whispered Ray as Gerald shook his head, a deep frown on his face. Quite frankly, he had no idea who they were either.

Following that, a man with a buzz cut stepped forward, staring at Gerald and his group before asking, “Who are you people?”

“Kind sir, we’re merely merchants who are here to have some fun!” replied Gerald.

“...Merchants you say? Out here in the middle of nowhere? Who are you trying to fool?” retorted the man as he glared at Gerald.

“You’re free to choose not to believe us. Regardless, what are you and your men doing all the way out here?” replied Gerald.

“We’re here to look for the vampires’ territory!” declared the man with the buzz cut, not seeing a reason to lie.

“...Oh? You’re here to look for their territory as well?” replied Gerald in surprise. To think that these men had the same goal as he had!

“Hmm? So, you’re saying we share a goal?” said the man as he signaled for the rest of his men to lower their weapons.

“Well then, if that’s the case, allow me to introduce myself! I go by Lech Zak, and I’m the leader of my team!” said Lech as he stretched his hand out.

Hearing that, Gerald then returned a firm handshake as he replied, “Gerald Crawford!”

Following that, Lech then said, “Didn’t expect to bump into other teams looking for the vampires’ territory as well!”

Nodding in agreement, Gerald then turned to look at Old Flint who had been standing behind him. Seeing that the old man wasn’t showing any response, Gerald was instantly relieved. After all, this meant that Old Flint didn’t have too much animosity toward Lech and his subordinates.

With that in mind, Gerald then turned to face Lech before asking, “Do you know where exactly the vampires’ territory is located?”

Retrieving a map from his pocket, Lech then spread it out for Gerald to have a look.

“We’re currently here, you see, and the vampires’ territory is within this mountain. With that in mind, we’ll need to dig our way into their territory!” explained Lech.

Hearing that, Gerald could instantly tell how well-prepared Lech and his subordinates were.

Regardless, since both parties were looking for the vampires’ territory anyway, they figured that they may as well just work as a team.

With that, after a short rest, the two groups then resumed their journey.

Eventually, they finally arrived at the area where they had planned to start digging.

“This is it, Gerald!” exclaimed Lech as he waved his hand at his team members—who were following behind—, indicating that they had arrived.

With that, Lech and his teammates retrieved their shovels—along with any relevant equipment—before starting to dig the earth beneath them.

“You guys keep an eye on things while we dig! Let’s get our well-deserved rest once we make it to the other side!” said Lech.

Knowing that it wasn’t easy to dig out a passageway and that it would be some time before Lech and his men were done, Gerald naturally had no objections.

After nodding in agreement, he then returned to his own party to start keeping watch.

Seeing that Gerald had returned, Ray then asked in a slightly worried tone, “...Do you trust these people, Mr. Crawford...?”

Understanding where Ray was coming from, Gerald then replied, “Don’t worry, I can sense that he’s a righteous man!”

Upon hearing that, Ray’s worries quickly subsided. After all, he trusted Gerald’s judgment.

“What about you, Old Flint? What do you think about Lech and his men?” asked Gerald as he turned to look at the old man who was sitting close to them. Throughout their journey, Old Flint had remained strangely quiet...

Regardless, the old man simply replied, “We’ll have more help with an additional team. There’s safety in

numbers!”

Hearing that, Gerald then nodded in agreement...

After two hours, a loud sound could be heard coming from where Lech and the others had been digging. Guessing that Lech and his men had managed to dig out a passageway, Gerald and his party quickly ran toward the sound.

As they had guessed, a giant passageway was now visible for all to see... With how dark it was inside, it was pretty much impossible to tell what was down there...

Regardless, Gerald and his party were just in time to see Lech ordering his men, “You two! Get in there and scout ahead! If you find that anything’s amiss, get out immediately!”

“Copy that!” replied the two men as they switched their flashlights on and began walking into the newly formed passageway...

Reappearing minutes later, the two men then reported, “Everything’s normal inside! We can go through!”

“Excellent! Still, please be careful, everyone! Don’t move around recklessly and always keep a lookout for your team members!” declared Lech.

“Loud and clear!” yelled everyone in response.

“Come, Gerald! Let’s head in together!” said Lech as he looked at Gerald.

Hearing that, Gerald nodded slightly before entering the passageway by Lech’s side, the rest of Gerald’s party following closely behind them.

Once inside, they soon saw all sorts of colorful paintings on either side of the stone walls. From how primitive they looked, one could easily guess that these paintings had been here for ages...

"...Can you discern anything from these paintings, Old Flint?" asked Gerald as he curiously turned to look at the old man.

After looking for a while, Old Flint then replied, "...The pictures describe the history of the vampires' development in ancient times! It very clearly describes the start of their species up till their eventual decline! With that in mind, I can safely say that we've made it into the vampires' territory!"

Upon hearing that, Gerald and the others were pleasantly surprised. After going through so much effort, they had finally managed to enter the vampires' territory!

"...However, the fact that those corpses were found dead like that... It can only mean that some vampires are still alive! They're incredibly dangerous opponents, so please be careful, everyone!" added Old Flint.

Vampires in general were an independent race that almost never had contact with people from the outside world. It definitely explained why they resented those from the outside world so much. It was also the reason why they usually attacked any non-vampires on sight.

It certainly didn't help that vampires were naturally fast and could easily kill any number of people they wanted.

"Not to worry, sir! All of us are experts at fighting, so we aren't to be trifled with either! With that in mind, I believe that the vampires won't dare to act all unrestrained on us!" replied Lech in a confident tone.

Upon hearing that, Old Flint gave no reply...

Regardless, after about ten minutes of walking, everyone finally made it out of the passageway that spanned at least a few hundred feet. Though they could've made it across much faster had they wanted to, they had taken their time while walking across since all manner of sharp gravel were scattered throughout the area. With that in mind, they were all honestly glad that they had thick-soled shoes on...

Either way, at the end of the passageway lay a gigantic hall... In the middle of the hall, was a wheel of sorts that only served to add to the area's strangeness and mysteriousness...

After looking around, the astonished Ray couldn't help but say, "Color me surprised! To think that such a large palace-like place would exist up here in the mountains!"

True enough, this place was much larger than the tomb they had seen in Ghost Country. With that in mind, it appeared that the vampires were extremely powerful...

Whatever the case was, the others then began curiously inspecting their surroundings... Gerald himself—as well as a few others—immediately went for the wheel in the middle of the room...

Looking at the wheel, Ray then asked, "Any idea what this wheel symbolizes, Mr. Crawford?"

Before Gerald could even reply, Old Flint explained, "That's the vampires' Wheel of the Sun and Moon! They use it to calculate time!"

"Calculate... time? Why would they require such a big wheel just to calculate time?" asked Ray.

"Oh, they didn't use it to calculate regular time. Instead, the wheel calculates when they need to replenish their blood!" replied Old Flint, instantly causing a chill to run down Ray's spine.

As it turned out, the vampires used this wheel to calculate when exactly they needed to suck fresh blood,

and the thought of it alone was honestly spine tingling...

At that moment, one of Lech's team members could be seen stretching out his hand to grab what seemed to be a pearl—that was embedded on one of the stone walls—as he shouted, “Hey captain, there's a pearl here! I'm sure it'll sell for a lot!”

Upon realizing what was happening, Gerald instantly yelled, “Don't pluck it off the wall!”

Unfortunately, Gerald was too late.

The team member had already taken it off the wall, and he was now looking at Gerald in bewilderment, wondering why he was getting so worked up about the pearl in his hand.

Before anyone could react any further, a thunderous sound could suddenly be heard!

Turning to face the source of the sound, everyone's eyes widened in horror when they realized that a massive stone had fallen and completely blocked the palace's entrance!

“Everyone, duck!” shouted Gerald as he instantly pushed Old Flint and the rest of his party members to the ground.

The second his sentence ended, countless arrows began shooting out from the surrounding stone walls!

Sadly, some of Lech's team members weren't quick enough to react, which led to them getting pierced by volleys of arrows! Soon enough, those members flopped to the ground, dead and lying in their own pools of blood...

For those who managed to duck in time, none of them dared to even raise their heads, afraid that arrows would pierce right through their skulls...

Nobody could've anticipated there to be such a death machine in this place...It wasn't long after before the place went silent again...

Since no more arrows were being shot out, it was only fair to assume that the terrifying mechanism had finally ended...

Breathing a sigh of relief, Lech then fearfully said, "To think that such a death trap would be here of all places, Mr. Crawford...!"

Nobody could have foreseen this... However, that didn't change the fact that this had been caused by one of Lech's men. The culprit himself had been pierced by dozens of arrows and was currently lying in his slowly encroaching pool of blood... What a terrible way to die...

Still, this was what happened when people randomly touched things in here. With that in mind, Lech then glared at his men before yelling, "Listen up! The rest of you aren't allowed to move until I say so!"

Hearing that, all of Lech's men simply nodded and remained standing where they currently were... Not that any of them were daring enough to touch anything anymore. After all, who knows what they could trigger next? The next trap they triggered could very well be the end of them!

Seeing that his men weren't objecting, Lech then turned to face Gerald again before asking, "What do you think we should do, Gerald? The exit's been sealed shut!"

As Lech had said, there was now a gigantic stone blocking the exit, which meant that there was no way they were going to be able to leave the way they came in from. With that in mind, they could only look for another exit...

"...Cave-like structures definitely have more than one exit, though the problem lies in how difficult it is to find them!" replied Gerald.

Hearing that, Lech then ordered, "Alright, listen up, men! There has to be a way to leave this place, so let's start looking for an exit!"

With that, everyone from Lech's team began scanning high and low for a way to leave the underground palace...

Gerald and his party, on the other hand, stood before the wheel, studying it to see if it had any way of getting them out of there...

Sometime later, Ray declared, "...Mr. Crawford! There appears to be a mechanism of sorts down here that can be turned!"

Upon hearing that, Gerald squatted down and saw that Ray was right. There was indeed a round mechanism that looked like it could be turned...

Old Flint himself then said, "If my guess is correct, turning that round mechanism should activate this wheel!"

Momentarily turning to face Old Flint, Gerald then nodded. He believed in the old man's wisdom, so he quickly began turning the mechanism without any hesitation...

Soon enough, a loud 'clank' could be heard.

After realizing that the wheel itself was starting to turn, Gerald and the others quickly took a few steps back, fully vigilant since nobody knew what was going to happen next.

The wheel itself only stopped turning after it slowly spun by a hundred and eighty degrees... And the second the turning ended, an explosive sound was heard!

Turning to face the source of the sound, everyone watched as an opening slowly revealed itself on the wall where the wheel ended up facing once it stopped moving. By the time the stone slab was fully lifted, everyone could only stare wide-eyed at the new entrance before them.

Quickly shaking the shock off, Gerald then said, "Let's go!"

With that, he and his party instantly entered the new opening. Naturally, Lech and his men quickly followed after as well.

While they had anticipated this to be their ticket out of here, it was anything but... As it turned out, it was the entrance of yet another underground palace!

There were towering stone pillars on either side of the newly uncovered underground palace, and beside each pillar was a platform. The middle of each platform gave off a faint light, illuminating just enough for all of them to see where they were going...

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"Hot d*mn! To think that there was another palace down here! In fact, this one looks much larger than the previous one!" exclaimed Ray.

"Please be careful, everyone! And don't do anything stupid!" warned Gerald, hoping that everyone had learned their lesson about randomly touching things.

"Copy that! Still, what are those things, Mr. Crawford...? They look so luxurious!" asked Ray as he walked toward one of the platforms to get a closer look.

"Those are Treasure Glaze Platforms. They're specially used to light up candlesticks used for sacrificial rituals. The fires in them can last forever!" explained Old Flint when he saw that Gerald was making no effort to reply.

Upon hearing that, Ray was rightfully shocked. To think that such magical items existed...

His awe was cut short, however, when everyone suddenly heard one of Lech's men scream in agony!

By the time they turned to look at him, his entire body was already burning! With scorched skin and eerily hollowed-out eyes, it wasn't long before all that remained of the man was a pool of blood on the ground!

With how gruesomely he had died, everyone was understandably terrified.

Though they made sure to distance themselves from that pool of blood, the same thing soon happened to yet another of Lech's team members! Before the second member died, however, Gerald and the others were able to notice several black, spider-like creepy-crawlies crawling all over the poor man's body.

Before they could even register what was going on, everyone froze when millions of tiny 'squeaks' could suddenly be heard all around them!

Immediately looking around to investigate, Gerald realized that countless of the spider-like creatures had appeared and were currently all over the surrounding pillars and on the ground!

"Run! Hurry!" yelled Gerald as he immediately dragged his party toward the innermost part of the underground palace.

Of course, Lech and his remaining men followed closely behind, though soon enough, both parties found that it was useless. They were completely surrounded by endless spiders! There was simply nowhere to retreat!

“W-what should we do, Mr. Crawford?!” asked the anxious Ray in a fearful voice.

A single spider was scary enough, but now that there were millions? It was beyond terrifying, to say the least.

Frowning deeply, Gerald then yelled, “Try using fire!”

Hearing that, everyone quickly gathered whatever they saw that could be burned before lighting them up and tossing them to the ground.

To their horror, many of the spiders persevered, and the fire was nothing more than a temporary obstruction for them!

With that in mind, it wasn't long before more of Lech's team members got into contact with the spiders and turned into pools of blood as well...

Seeing that, Gerald and the remaining survivors were terrified out of their minds... None of them wanted to die so terribly...

Calming himself, Gerald racked his mind for a solution, until suddenly, an idea came to him.

Looking at Juno, Gerald then quickly asked, “Juno! Do you have anything that repels insects with you?”

Upon hearing that, she nodded before replying, “I-I do have a can of insecticide with me! I don't know how useful it'll be, though!”

“Just give it to me! Hurry!” instructed Gerald as Juno quickly fished out her insecticide from her bag.

Thankfully, Juno had brought along that can of insecticide to deter insects from biting them while they were in the forest. To think that it would actually be a life saver...

Regardless, the second the insecticide was in Gerald's hand, he immediately sprayed it on the surrounding spiders... and it seemed to work!

The second they came into contact with the insecticide, the spiders rapidly began retreating! They were saved! "...Thank god you brought along this young woman, Gerald...! Otherwise, we would've all met our maker today...!" muttered the still fearful Lech, as he expressed his gratitude toward both Juno and Gerald.

Had Juno not brought along that can of insecticide, they'd surely have died today...

Following that, Gerald then broke the can open before rubbing some of the liquid inside on his clothes.

"Rub some of it on your bodies! With any luck, it'll continue warding off the spiders!" instructed Gerald.

Hearing that, everyone then quickly began doing just that, making sure to rub as much of the insecticide as possible onto their clothes and shoes. Hopefully, this would keep the spiders away...

Now that the crisis was over, Old Flint then said, "...I'm guessing the vampires raised those spiders. If my analysis is correct, any blood that the spiders suck can later be retrieved by the vampires for their own consumption..."

"How abominable! To think that they would actually raise such horrible creatures!" scowled Gerald.

Then again, it made sense. Only the vampires could think of such a vile tactic...

Regardless, Gerald and the others then resumed inspecting the area soon after...

Sometime later, one of Lech's men came running toward them—from the deeper parts of the underground palace—as he shouted, “Captain! We've managed to locate a stone door deeper in!”

Hearing that, both parties immediately rushed toward that place, and soon enough, they were greeted by the sight of a massive stone door...

“Push the door open!” yelled Lech.

“Copy that!” replied his remaining men as they instantly began pushing the door in hopes of opening it...

To their dismay, no matter how much they pushed, the stone door never moved an inch!

Seeing that, Gerald then said, “Since it can't be opened by force, I'm sure there's a mechanism somewhere that'll get it to open!”

Following that, Gerald quickly began investigating the area in search of mechanisms that would trigger the door to open...

Just as Gerald had anticipated, it wasn't long after before he found a spot on the walls that could be pushed. Pushing it down hard, the stone began moving backward... and soon enough, a loud sound could be heard!

With the mechanism now triggered, the stone door began quivering, and soon enough, it began rising!

“Marvellous! You truly are amazing, Mr. Crawford!” praised Lech.

Either way, by the time the stone door was fully opened, everyone couldn't help but momentarily gape

in awe. Past the door, was a large, glazed house, alongside two stone bridges. Adding that to the fact that the floor was paved with bluestone, the sight was nothing short of extraordinary...

Once they snapped out of it, everyone rushed to one of the stone bridges. However, upon peering below, what awaited them wasn't a river nor a pool... Instead, it appeared to be a bottomless abyss that struck fear into anyone who saw it...

Regardless, the group then moved past the bridge and soon found themselves standing right before the glaze house.

"...The house appears ancient... If my guess is correct, then this should be the center most part of the vampires' territory!" declared Old Flint as he sighed rather emotionally.

To think that all of them had finally reached the deepest part of the vampires' territory... The entire journey truly had been difficult, and many large sacrifices had undeniably been made to get this far...

However, it wasn't long after before Gerald and the others noticed a problem, that being the fact that the house's large door was locked.

Seeing that, Lech immediately ordered, "Men, unlock the door!"

Hearing that, a specialist from Lech's team quickly took a few tools out from his fanny pack and got to work...

Not too long after, a clatter could be heard, signifying that the unlocking process was a success!

With that, Lech then pushed the door open and everyone else made sure to follow behind him. Upon entering, however, they quickly realized that the insides were mostly barren aside from a large disc in the middle of the house that was surrounded by four pillars...

“Now what could that be...” muttered the slightly curious Gerald.

Hearing that, Old Flint then said, “...This should be where the vampires cultivate themselves. Looking at the disc, I’m guessing that only the leader of the vampires is allowed to sit there!”

As Gerald nodded in understanding, Lech himself could be seen frowning as he asked in a dissatisfied tone, “...Whatever the case is, there’s nothing in here! Are you sure we’ve found the right place?”

There was simply nothing of value that Lech could see.

“This is definitely the vampires’ territory! I’m sure of it!” replied Old Flint, his tone resolute.

Upon hearing that, the disappointed Lech could only choose to believe the old man’s words.

Shortly after, Lech led his men away to start searching the place for valuables. Gerald and his party, on the other hand, remained in the glaze house, hoping to uncover any information from the disc.

It wasn’t long after before Lech and his teammates discovered a secret room at the side of the house...

Upon entering, their eyes instantly widened. This place was filled with riches and treasures of all kinds! Upon closer inspection, there was even a giant pellet-making furnace in the middle of the room!

Walking toward the table by the furnace, Lech was quick to notice several bottles—ranging from small to large—placed neatly on it.

“There are lots of pellets here, captain! Are we taking them away as well?” asked one of Lech’s men.

“What kind of bullsh*t question is that? Of course, we’re taking them! They’re valuable medicines, you know? They’ll surely sell for a hefty price!” retorted Lech.

Hearing that, his men then immediately began taking action, carrying everything valuable—that they could—out of the room. Naturally, this included the pellets.

By that point, Gerald and the others had already left the house. When they saw Lech and his team members taking so many spoils with them, all of them were naturally shocked.

Even so, Gerald didn’t try to stop them. After all, unlike Lech—who had specifically come here in search of treasure—, Gerald and his party had other objectives. With that in mind, there was no reason for him to fight for any spoils with Lech and his team members.

Still, that didn’t stop Ray from whispering, “Those people are way too crazy, Mr. Crawford!”

“Pay them no heed. Let’s just focus on taking care of ourselves!” replied Gerald with a subtle smile.

Old Flint himself then added in a serious tone, “They’ll be punished sooner or later. After all, those treasures are cursed! Whoever takes them will surely not have a good end. With that said, don’t even think about touching any of the treasures you see!”

“Old Flint is right. No matter how precious the items you encounter are, never take them! Actually, to be on the safe side, don’t even touch them!” Gerald made sure to repeat Old Flint’s message just to emphasize how dangerous it was to even touch the treasures in this place. While human greed was near endless, self-control was key in surviving, especially in their current situation...

Regardless, after nearly half an hour of transferring all manner of treasures out of that room, Lech and his men had compiled enough riches to fill at least two large cars... Seeing how much treasure there was, it was no wonder why Lech and his men had been drawn to this place...

Either way, once Lech got out of the secret room for the final time, he then walked toward Gerald before smiling as he said, "These are the treasures we got from that secret room, Gerald! Since both parties have contributed a lot to get this far, I'm willing to share some of our spoils with you!"

Smiling subtly in return, Gerald then replied, "I appreciate the consideration, Mr. Zak, but we didn't come here for the vampires' treasures. With that in mind, you're free to keep all the spoils!"

Upon hearing that, Lech was momentarily stunned. To think that Gerald would actually reject treasure!

'If he and his party didn't come here for treasure, then what did they come here for...?' wondered Lech.

After a brief pause, Lech then smiled as he said, "...Well then! Since you're being so kind, I'll gladly just take all the treasure with my men!"

With that, Lech and his men then began leaving the area.

Once they were quite a distance away, one of Lech's couldn't help but ask in an astonished tone, "Were... they uninterested in the treasure, captain? But if that's the case, why did they come here in the first place...?"

Lech only sneered in response, his expression gloomy.

'There are clearly only two reasons why they would have rejected my offer... Either they really do have another objective... Or there's something even more valuable down here aside from what we've found!' Lech thought to himself.

At the very least, he had more or less accurately guessed that Gerald and his party had no interest in the treasure since they were after some other important thing that was useless to Lech and his men.

Gerald and his party themselves would've never anticipated that Lech would actually think about them that way...

All of a sudden, one of Lech's men began screaming, "S-spiders! Massive spiders up ahead!"

Turning to look at the man who had shouted—who was currently attempting to flee backward—Lech stared wide-eyed as several humongous spiders began leaping out from the abyss under the stone bridge! Without even giving Lech and his men a fighting chance, the large spiders instantly attacked them!

As they attempted to defend themselves, Lech and his men quickly realized that hundreds of small spiders had also rushed out and had now completely surrounded them!

Seeing that, Gerald and Ray instantly wanted to help them. However, they were promptly stopped by Old Flint who declared, "Stop! Not a step further!"

"What? Why can't we help them?" asked the vexed Gerald.

"Have a good look! The spiders aren't coming for us at all! They're only rushing for that group, which proves that the curse of the treasures is starting to take effect!" explained Old Flint.

Upon hearing that, Gerald finally understood why all this was happening. "So what you're saying is that the spiders will only attack those who touch the treasures?" asked Gerald.

Watching as Old Flint nodded, Gerald and his party were instantly shocked. To think that the spiders would actually select their pRay...

Meanwhile, Lech and his remaining team members were being swallowed alive by the gigantic spiders!

It was truly a gruesome sight...

Staring at Gerald—who was still standing by the door—the pitiful Lech who was getting devoured could only plead, “B-brother Crawford...! Please, save us...!”

“H-Help! Please...!” screamed the other agonized members of Lech’s team as well.

Even so, there was nothing that Gerald could do. All of them had taken the cursed treasures due to their immense greed. In other words, they had brought all this upon themselves. With that in mind, Gerald could only watch helplessly as they continued screaming and getting eaten...

Lech himself was torn clean in half before being tossed right into the abyss...

As for the rest of his team members, they were completely swallowed up by the smaller spiders, and all that was left of them now were puddles of blood...

It had barely even taken minutes for Lech and his group to be completely taken out...

Regardless, now that Lech and his men had been dealt with, the giant spiders then turned to eye Gerald and his party.

Though Gerald and his party vigilantly stared back at them, in the end, the spiders never made a move on them. Instead, they simply returned into the abyss under the stone bridge along with the smaller spiders...

This was naturally a pleasant surprise for Gerald and his group. To think that the spiders would actually leave them be! With their worst fears now over, they could all finally take breaths of relief...

Ray himself—who had earlier been anxious out of his mind—couldn’t help but sit on the ground, finally

able to catch his breath now that the danger had passed. After a while, the still jittery Ray then turned to face Gerald and Old Flint before saying, “That was way too nerve-wracking, Gerald! Thankfully you warned us about not touching the treasure, Old Flint! Otherwise, we would’ve surely suffered the same fate!”

After nodding in agreement, Gerald and Old Flint then began heading over to where Lech’s teammates had died... Even from afar, all the treasure they had been carrying could be seen lying in piles on the ground...

As they got closer, Gerald’s nose couldn’t help but twitch, prompting him to ask, “...Do you smell that?”

Smelling the same light scent that Gerald was, Old Flint then explained, “...This is sandalwood incense. The vampires must have used this to lure the spiders! It appears that this is how the ‘curse’ operates!”

Feeling enlightened, Gerald then replied, “So what you’re saying is that the smell—that had originated from the treasure—ended up transferring onto Lech and his men after they touched them? And that the spiders only attack those who have the smell lingering around them? If that’s the case, everything makes sense now!”

As it turned out, the ‘curse’ was merely an overstatement. In the end, it was an explainable phenomenon that simply required a little more investigation...

Shaking his head, Old Flint then sighed before saying, “Still, they only have themselves to blame... Had they not been greedy enough to touch the treasure, the spiders wouldn’t have attacked them in the first place!”

As the saying went, you reap what you sow...

Whatever the case was, Gerald wasn’t interested in thinking any further about it anymore. Some things and people were simply destined to be ruined. While he wanted to say that Lech was simply unlucky, it was honestly not that much of a surprise that he ended up dying this way...

Soon after, Gerald and the others returned to the chamber once more...

However, once inside, they were suddenly greeted by odd knocking sounds...

Now feeling vigilant, Ray couldn't help but look at Gerald as he asked, "...Do you hear that, brother Gerald?"

Nodding, Gerald then replied, "I do."

With that, all five of them immediately began looking for the exact source of the sound... until eventually, Gerald realized that it was coming from the very center of the round platform in the chamber...

"...The sound is coming from over there!" said Gerald as he pointed at the platform.

Hearing that, everyone quickly gathered around the platform before pressing their ears onto it... True enough, now that their ears were directly on the platform, the constant knocking became even clearer! Upon closer inspection, the knocking sounded almost rhythmic as well.

"...Do... you think someone could be trapped inside, Gerald...?" asked Ray.

"...Judging from the rhythmic knocking, that may just be the case!" replied Gerald, feeling that only a living thing would be capable of making such varied knocking.

After a slight pause, Gerald then instructed, "...Investigate the platform, Ray! We may be able to open it up!"

Hearing that, Ray instantly did as he was told. After a while, he noticed something odd.

Pointing at an obscure pull ring on the round platform, Ray then said, “Gerald, I think I’ve found something!”

Walking over to have a look, Gerald could see that a chain was attached to the pull ring. In other words, it could definitely be pulled.

“...All of you, stand back! I’m pulling the ring! The second you feel that something’s wrong, I want you to leave this place immediately!” ordered Gerald as he looked at the rest of his party members.

Once they were quite a distance away from him, Gerald then began tugging the pull ring...

As Gerald closed his eyes tight—since he needed quite a bit of force to even tug the pull ring—the others held their breaths as they kept their eyes glued on the round platform, ready to bolt if anything bad happened.

Regardless, the clanking of chains soon began echoing across the chamber...

After a little while, Gerald couldn’t be bothered tugging slowly anymore and simply yanked the chain—that was several meters in length—till it could no longer be tugged.

Now that the chain couldn’t be tugged any further, the round platform slowly split in two, revealing an opening in the middle of it!

Seeing that, Ray and the others didn’t dare to move an inch, simply remaining vigilant as they waited to see what would happen next...

Gerald—being the fearless person he was—on the other hand, simply tossed the chain onto the ground

before walking toward the now open platform...

Staring into the hole, Gerald couldn't help but raise his eyebrows...Imprisoned at the bottom, appeared to be a strong, long-haired, ape-like creature...

"...What's down there, Brother Gerald?" asked Ray in a whispery voice.

Looking at them, Gerald then quietly signaled for them to come over to have a look for themselves.

Seeing that, the other members of Gerald's party then crept over before peering down as well.

Looking at Old Flint, Gerald then asked, "...Do you have any idea what that is, Old Flint...?"

After seemingly thinking for a while, Old Flint then replied, "...If my eyes do not deceive me, that should be a black gibbon. I recall a tale about the vampires raising a black gibbon and using it to help them catch humans... Perhaps this is the one!"

As Gerald's eyes widened, Ray quickly said, "Then... this black gibbon must be a fierce beast! It's best that we keep it locked under the platform!"

True enough, such a vicious black gibbon couldn't be allowed to run free. Otherwise, it would surely spell trouble! Unfortunately, Ray had said that a bit too late.

After all, the beast had long broken free of its chains, and it had simply been trapped beneath the round platform for the longest time. Now that the platform was finally open, however, it naturally wanted to escape.

With that in mind, the second Ray's sentence ended, an ear-piercing roar could be heard! A split second later, the black gibbon leaped right out from the bottom of the platform that was at least a few meters

high! What superior jumping capabilities!

Seeing that, Gerald and the others instantly backed away as they vigilantly stared into the eyes of the beast. The gibbon itself stared back at each of them before beating its chest!

Before anyone could react, the beast bolted right out of the chamber, disappearing from view!

Since it hadn't attacked them, all of them found themselves feeling slightly confused. Then again, they weren't complaining. After all, at the very least, they now had one less problem to worry about...

"...Alright, we need to start looking for the exit. We shouldn't stay here any longer!" declared Gerald. After all, who knows what other dangers they would face here.

While it was true that the gibbon and spiders hadn't chosen to attack them, it didn't mean that there weren't any other threats down here. Gerald himself believed that they shouldn't push their luck by staying down here for any longer...

Regardless, after hearing that, Ray, Juno, and Nori readily agreed. After all, they had all been eager to leave this place for a while now. Old Flint himself simply agreed calmly. After all, being used to such situations, fear was the last thing on his mind.

Whatever the case was, Gerald and the others then began looking for the exit...

Instead of an exit, however, the party soon bumped into what appeared to be the entrance of another chamber...

Upon entering, they were instantly greeted by the sight of a sandalwood casket decorated with gold trims... The casket itself was suspended a few meters above the ground by four chains that held onto its corners...

“My god! I never imagined all this to be within a mountain! What a massive place!” exclaimed Ray, his eyes widened. For Ray, this entire trip had been incredible, and nearly everything that had happened had amazed him...

Old Flint himself slowly walked to the bottom of the casket. After examining it for a while, his voice almost sounded emotional as he muttered, “This... This must be where the vampires buried their ancestors...! This casket must have belonged to the first ancestor of the vampires...!”

“What? But that means this casket must have been here for thousands of years!” exclaimed Gerald.

Indeed. Countless people have attempted to locate the casket of the first vampire ancestor in order to obtain the vampiric pearl within it...” replied Old Flint with a nod.

“The vampiric pearl? You came here looking for that, right?” asked Gerald.

“I did. The vampiric pearl is a treasure of the vampires that’ll allow me to obtain a new body!” explained Old Flint.

Upon hearing that, Gerald simply nodded. While the treasure certainly sounded intriguing, he wasn’t all that interested in it. After all, he had only come here to help Old Flint out.

Regardless, after properly inspecting it, Gerald then said, “...Well, it seems safe enough. Let’s open the casket!”

Hearing that, Old Flint then nodded, eager to finally be able to get his hands on the vampiric pearl.

Seeing no objections from Old Flint, Gerald then turned to face Juno and Nori before saying, “You two, stay a distance from us! If anything goes wrong, run for it, understand?”

Naturally, Juno and Nori obeyed. Quickly walking toward the entrance, both of them then stood still, not daring to move around too much as they waited for Gerald and the other two to begin uncovering the casket...

Seeing that the girls were now at a safe distance, Gerald then faced Ray before instructing, "Ray, come over here! You're in charge of unchaining those two corners while I unchain these two!"

Once both of them got into position, Gerald and Ray then slowly began unchaining the casket... and once the final chains were released, the casket fell to the ground with a loud 'thud', instantly sending a cloud of dust flying all over the place!

Since the casket had been here for thousands of years, it wasn't all that surprising for it to be this dusty. Whatever the case was, their next step was to open it...

"...Alright, stand there and help me push the lid off!" ordered Gerald.

"Sure thing, Gerald!" replied Ray as he did as he was told...

Following that, Gerald then pushed hard to open the lid of the casket... and soon enough, the contents inside were plain for all to see.

Everyone close enough was greeted by the sight of a body that couldn't decay any further as well as several treasures that had been placed along with the corpse.

Seeing that, Old Flint instantly began investigating the contents of the coffin...

"Where could the vampiric pearl be...?" asked Gerald in a curious tone.

However, before Old Flint could come up with an answer, Gerald—who had noticed that the vampire’s throat was bulging slightly—quickly added, “...I... I think it’s in his throat!”

With that said, Gerald then took a small knife out before slicing open the corpse’s throat... And sure enough, a blood-red pearl soon revealed itself! It was the legendary vampiric pearl!

Handing it to Old Flint, Gerald then asked, “This should be it, right?”

The old man’s hands now quivering, Old Flint then emotionally replied, “...Yes... Yes, it is... I’ve finally found it... The vampiric pearl...! To think that it would be so well preserved...!”

Despite the joyous occasion, it was around then when the vampire’s body crumbled into ashes before promptly disappearing...

Seeing this, Gerald couldn’t help but frown slightly. For some reason, he felt that something was off...

Regardless, the old man quickly began mumbling excitedly to himself as he walked over to a lone corner to admire the pearl...

While his behavior was slightly odd, Gerald and Ray simply exchanged glances with one another. Whatever the case was, their mission was complete now that they had obtained the pearl. With that in mind, it meant that it was high time they finally left this horrible place...

With that, Gerald then said, “...Alright, since we’ve got what we wanted, let’s hurry and leave this place already!”

Naturally, Nori, Juno, and Ray agreed to that without a second thought.

As they quickly gathered their things to prepare to leave, Ray couldn’t help but notice that Old Flint was

still standing in the same corner, though he was now trembling for some reason...

Finding it slightly odd, Ray then called out, "Old Flint, we're about to leave now!"

However, the second his sentence ended, Ray's eyes widened when Old Flint turned back to glare at him, his eyes now fully crimson...

Shivering in fear, Ray then yelled, "Um, G-Gerald? Something's wrong with Old Flint...!"

Hearing that, he turned to look at the old man and quickly found himself shocked to see Old Flint's state as well.

"...Old Flint...? What's wrong?" asked Gerald in a serious tone, his eyebrows furrowed.

Unfortunately for them, this wasn't the Old Flint they used to know anymore. While his appearance remained the same, the red-eyed being before them was now nothing more than a blood-craving monster...

"Gerald, look at his throat! There's a red glow there!" yelled Ray, prompting Gerald to focus his gaze there.

True to Ray's observation, there really was a red glow there, and it was then when Gerald understood what was happening. Old Flint must have swallowed the vampiric pearl! As a result, he was now a bloodthirsty vampire!

With a bloodcurdling roar, everyone watched wide-eyed as blood dripped from the corners of Old Flint's widened mouth... before the old man bolted for Gerald and his party!

Vampires loved consuming the fresh blood of the living the most... With that in mind, Gerald knew that

Old Flint now saw him and his party as nothing more than a meal!

Understanding that, Gerald quickly rushed forward while yelling, "Get out! All of you! I'll deal with him!"

Upon hearing that, Ray instantly began dragging Juno and Nori out of the area, the trio then hiding not too far off to observe what would happen next.

Gerald himself immediately summoned his Astrabyss Sword before slashing it onto Old Flint!

However, what followed was a loud, 'clunk'! As it turned out, not only was the sword ineffective against the old man, but Old Flint's body was now as hard as steel! From the looks of it, the old man's skin was now probably sword and bulletproof!

Seeing that Gerald was fighting back, Old Flint—who no longer recognized Gerald—attempted to claw at the youth, though Gerald was able to dodge his attack by taking a step back.

Growling in annoyance, the old man then leaped at Gerald, attempting to pin him down! Of course, Gerald wasn't about to give him that chance. After waiting for the perfect moment, Gerald retaliated with a kick, sending the old man flying backward!

While Gerald managed to avoid getting attacked, Old Flint himself looked perfectly fine as he got to his feet again. From the looks of it, Gerald's powerful kick probably felt like nothing more than a tickle to the old man...

Roaring in anger, Old Flint quickly began charging toward Gerald again, this time more frantic than before!

In response, Gerald tossed out what seemed to be a ghostly chain as he yelled, "Soul Chain!"

The chain itself flew toward the old man before wrapping itself around Old Flint's body! Now bound, Old Flint began thrashing around, desperately trying to free himself. With how violent the old man was, Gerald couldn't help but think that had he used rope instead of the Soul Chain, Old Flint would've broken free by now...

Regardless, seeing that the old man was temporarily bound, Gerald wordlessly bolted toward Old Flint before poking at his throat!

And just like that, the vampiric pearl came flying right out of Old Flint's mouth!

The second it was out, Old Flint appeared to calm down considerably, his eyes quickly returning to their initial color... As it turned out, the vampiric pearl truly was the culprit...

Whatever the case was, Old Flint soon regained his consciousness... Now sobered up, the first thing the old man asked was, "...What... What happened to me...?" "...Don't tell me... You don't remember anything at all?" replied Gerald.

Shaking his head in his slight confusion, it truly appeared that he had no memory of what had just taken place.

"...Tell me, why did you swallow the vampiric pearl?" asked Gerald. After all, had the old man not swallowed it, he wouldn't have entered that maddened state.

"I... What? I... swallowed it...?!" replied Old Flint, his eyes widened in disbelief as he stared at Gerald.

"You did! After swallowing it, you turned into a madman and started attacking us!" explained Gerald.

After hearing everything that had happened from Gerald, Old Flint couldn't help but look at the pearl—that was still on the ground—as he muttered in his bewilderment, "...I... The last thing I remember was you giving the pearl to me... I had no idea I did all that after that!"

Staring at the old man, Gerald had a feeling that he wasn't lying. Call it a gut feeling, but Gerald chose to believe Old Flint's point of view.

However, if Old Flint truly hadn't been in control of himself when he started attacking, that clearly meant that the vampiric pearl was the source of the problem.

Still, if that was the case, why didn't anything happen to Gerald when he touched the pearl earlier? What bizarre secrets lay behind all this...?

Whatever the case was, after thinking for a brief moment, Gerald told Ray to hand him a piece of cloth. Once he obtained it, Gerald then wrapped the pearl in it before slipping it into his bag.

It was better not to have such a terrifying item too close to him. Otherwise, who knew what would end up happening?

Either way, it wasn't long after before Gerald and the others managed to find a way out of the vampires' territory. However, now that they were finally free, the party of five didn't descend the mountain. Instead, they went upward.

Soon enough, it began snowing rather heavily... It certainly didn't help that the north wind was blowing so hard.

"Why the hell is it snowing all of a sudden?! What even is this place?" exclaimed Ray in his surprise.

"Let's not think about that first... We need to focus on finding shelter!" replied Gerald as he kept an eye out on anyplace they could hide from the snow.

Agreeing with Gerald, the five people quickly began scouting through the area... and eventually, they

found a dark cave.

By that point, the snow was falling so heavily that it was evident that a snowstorm was coming soon. With that in mind, Gerald and the others were thankful that they had managed to find shelter before that happened.

Upon entering, they found that it was a pretty suitable place to wait out the snowstorm. Even if it wasn't, it still beat being buried by snow in the middle of nowhere...

Once they entered a bit deeper, however, Ray quickly pinched his nose as he grumbled, "The hell? What on earth is this horrible smell?"

Hearing Ray's complaint, Gerald and the others quickly caught onto the pungent odor as well. Soon enough, it got so terrible that they felt like vomiting! Even so, they didn't have much of a choice but to remain here. It was either this, or dying under layers of snow...

"...Just bear with it. Some animals may have been here before!" replied Gerald.

Nodding in resignation, everyone simply sat down, hoping that the snowstorm would end soon...

To their dismay, it showed no signs of stopping, even after quite a while.

While they didn't realize it, all five of them slowly began dozing off... To be fair, they hadn't rested for an entire day, so it only made sense for all five of them to feel completely drained...

Though having a nap wasn't really an issue, the real problem was that they didn't know what inhabited this cave...

And soon enough, two red glints could be seen coming from deeper within the cave...As the two glints

came closer, it was slowly revealed that they were the eyes of a huge white bear!

Since Gerald and the others were currently fast asleep, none of them knew how dangerous their current situation was!

Regardless, after looking at the five people who had dozed off at the cave's entrance, the bear seemed particularly interested in Ray. The fact that Ray was snoring only attracted the bear's attention even more!

Slowly moving toward Ray, the bear quickly began licking his face!

"...Five more minutes... What is it Gerald...? Has the snow stopped...?" mumbled the sleepy Ray as he began patting the bear's face...

The second he felt how unnaturally furry 'Gerald' was, Ray instantly froze. This... This wasn't Gerald, was it.

By the time he opened his eyes, Gerald and the others were already staring vigilantly at the bear. To think that such a dangerous creature would be living in this cave! With how close the bear was, all of them could smell it and even feel the warmth its body was exuding...!

Slowly motioning for Ray not to move hastily, Ray gulped before slowly turning to see what he was patting... and the next thing he knew, he was staring straight into the eyes of the white bear...!

Instantly overwhelmed with fear, the bear appeared to sense that, and it immediately let out a terrifying roar!

Seeing how wide the bear's jaws now were, Gerald immediately yanked Ray away from the bear before yelling, "Run!"

Hearing that, the rest of the party instantly bolted out of the cave together with Gerald!

Quite honestly, they would've been much better off if they hadn't chosen to run. After all, the white bear immediately got excited when it saw how fast Gerald and his party were running. In the end, it was a carnivore, and it craved fresh meat, especially from such lively humans!

With that, the white bear quickly began chasing after them!

Instinctively turning back to look, Ray was horrified when he saw that the bear was chasing after him!

"H-hey, now! I'm all skin and bones, brother! Stop chasing me already...!" yelled Ray in his desperation as he continued fleeing from the hungry bear. It was his first time being chased by a white bear, and he hoped that if he survived, there wouldn't ever be a second time. What an utterly horrible experience!

By that point, Gerald had managed to find a safe spot for Juno and the two others to hide in.

Running toward Ray, Gerald then yelled, "Over here! Hurry!"

Upon hearing that, Ray instantly began running toward Gerald!

Seeing that the bear was still targeting the frantic Ray, Gerald quickly summoned the Astrabyss Sword, hoping to finish off the white bear.

"Leave it to me, Ray! Go hide with the others!" ordered Gerald as the bear came dangerously close to him.

Aiming closely, Gerald then slashed the sword the second the bear got close enough! While the attack was able to hit, Gerald had only managed to inflict a minor cut to the bear's underbelly! In other words, the bear wasn't all that hurt yet!

Now irritated, the bear stomped its paws before charging fiercely toward Gerald!

In barely a second, the bear was already inches before Gerald! Even if he didn't die from being smacked by the white bear, he was sure to still get seriously injured!

Of course, Gerald wasn't about to grant it that opportunity.

Dodge rolling till he was right under the white bear's belly, Gerald then stabbed it right into the beast!

With how loudly the bear had roared in response, Gerald knew that he had finally managed to deal substantial damage on the bear!

Even so, that stab wasn't enough to kill it. In fact, it only made the bear even more enraged! Now looking like it had gone mad, the bear began attacking Gerald with all that it had!

If it wasn't for the fact that this was a life-or-death situation, the sight of Gerald and the bear leaping all over the mountain was honestly quite amusing.

Regardless, after realizing that it wasn't going to be able to get its hands on Gerald, the bear suddenly switched targets to the others who were hiding!

Realizing that the bear was running toward his friends, Gerald then yelled, "Careful! It's coming!"

Seeing the incoming bear, the rest of Gerald's party quickly attempted to disperse from the tree that they had been hiding behind this entire time!

Before they knew it, however, the bear had rammed its head right into the tree! While none of them

were directly hit by the bear, the immense impact of the collision caused all four of them to momentarily lose their footing!

Unluckily, Juno took a step too far backward and was now frantically attempting to balance herself from falling right into the valley!

Upon seeing that, Gerald instantly bolted toward the scene!

Giving the white bear a hard kick, the beast ended up flying right down the valley! With the main threat now gone, Gerald then rushed to save Juno!

While he was just in time to grab onto her hand, the soil at their feet was a bit too loose, and both of them ended up falling right into the valley!

Eyes widened in horror as they watched their friends fall down the valley, Ray and Nori could only yell, "Gerald! Juno...!"

It was sometime later before the duo finally awoke again... Somehow, they had managed to survive the fall... Looking around, they quickly realized that a stray branch had broken their fall!

Whatever the case was, Gerald found himself quickly asking in a concerned tone, "Are you alright, Juno?"

Nodding subtly, Juno then replied, "I'm fine... I just hurt my arm a bit... I'm guessing it's a sprain!"

Watching as she rubbed her arm, Gerald quickly began examining it by gently pinching it... After a while, Gerald breathed a sigh of relief as he said, "...Yeah, it should just be a sprain. Thankfully it's not a fracture!"

Hearing that, Juno felt much more rest assured.

Still, she couldn't help but look down. They were still quite a distance off the ground... It certainly didn't help that it was pitch dark down there. Neither of them knew what lay down there at all...

"...Say... how are we even going to get down...?" muttered Juno.

"Hush. Do you hear that?" replied Gerald as he looked at the girl.

Upon hearing that, both of them momentarily fell silent as they perked their ears...

After a short while, both of them widened their eyes before shouting at the same time, "... That's the sound of flowing water!"

"...Say, Gerald...? Do you think...?" mumbled Gerald as she turned to look at Gerald.

"Indeed! From the sound of it, there appears to be a river down there!" replied Gerald as he nodded confidently.

"...Then, are you thinking of...?" asked Juno as she paid close attention to his response...

Seeing the subtle smile on Gerald's face after she said that, she knew that Gerald had got the message. In the end, Juno was probably the only person who could understand him so quickly...

"You know me, Juno! Since we don't have any further options, we can only take risks!" replied Gerald.

Since it was quite a distance down and they didn't have any other way of descending, they just had to

take the risk and hope they fell into the river...

“...Agreed! I’m with you!”

Juno trusted Gerald a lot, which was why she wasn’t against Gerald’s dare-devilish suggestion.

What more, if they leaped together, they’d at least die together... Though needless to say, surviving together was definitely still Juno’s main goal.

Regardless, after readying themselves, Gerald then looked at Juno before asking, “Ready?”

Watching as she nodded firmly, Gerald then hugged her tight... before both of them plunged deep into the valley!

Falling faster, and faster, it was only a few seconds later when both of them fell into a body of running water with a massive splash!

As they had guessed, there really was a river at the bottom, and thank god they were right. The river saved their lives...

Whatever the case was, now that they were still alive, Gerald—who hadn’t let go of Juno this entire time—quickly swam Juno to the river bank...

Now soaking wet and freezing—since the river water consisted of freshly melted snow from the mountains—Juno couldn’t help but find herself shivering.

Seeing that, he knew he had to get them warm as soon as possible.

With that in mind, Gerald then wordlessly began running into a nearby forest to gather dry branches and twigs. Once there was enough, he quickly rubbed two sticks together, and with enough friction, a fire was eventually started...

Pleased with how well the branches and twigs were burning, Gerald then called out, "Over here, Juno! Hurry and take whatever clothes you can off to let them dry as well!"

Too cold to even reply, Juno then shivered over and removed everything—but her undergarments—before sitting right beside him by the fire...

Seeing that Gerald then wrapped his arms around her for extra warmth...

When she finally got warm enough, Juno couldn't help but blush when she realized how close she now was to Gerald...

Gerald himself couldn't help but feel that the shy girl looked extremely lovely under the light of the fire...

Regardless, with how tightly he was holding onto her, Juno felt a great sense of security... And throughout her life, Gerald had been the only person who had made her feel this secure.

Eventually, Juno couldn't help but raise her head, smiling as she said, "It's so nice to have you by my side, Gerald!"

Smiling in response, Gerald then pecked her on her forehead before replying, "I'll be by your side throughout this Juno! You'll always be safe with me!"

Nodding, Juno gladly believed in his words. As long as she was with him, she feared nothing.

It was about half an hour later when their clothes finally dried up. With that, the duo got to their feet and began leaving the forest. After all, the sooner they reunited with Ray and the others, the better.

After striding through the forest for a while, a black wolf suddenly leaped out from the bushes!

Watching as it charged toward them, Gerald swiftly punched it right in the head, resulting in the agonized wolf howling one final time before it fell to the ground, dead!

To be able to kill a wolf with just a single hit, Gerald's punching force was truly nothing to scoff at...

Either way, Gerald found the wolf's appearance to be a blessing. After all, they didn't have to worry about starving now!

"Are you hungry, Juno? Also, I'm assuming you've never tried wolf meat before?" asked Gerald.

Startled, Juno instantly shook her head. She knew where this conversation was going...

"Great! I haven't tasted wolf before either, so this will be a nice gustatory experience for both of us! Not that we have any other food sources anyway, so we may as well just fill our bellies with what we have!" added Gerald. Naturally, Juno wasn't against that idea.

Regardless, Gerald then got to work processing and butchering the wolf.

He made sure to properly skin the wolf since wolf fur could be sold for a pretty hefty price. Once that was done, he then sliced the wolf's meat into manageable pieces.

After washing the meat by the river, Gerald started another fire. Once that was up, grilled wolf meat was soon to come...

It was never a good idea to travel with an empty stomach and both of them knew it. With that in mind, eating till they were full was their current best course of action.

In less than half an hour, the wolf meat was already well-done and both of them could finally dig in. Using a large leaf he found as a plate, Gerald then tore off a few chunks of the cooked meat before handing them to Juno.

After getting some for himself as well, both of them then sat under a tree to enjoy their meal.

Taking the first bite, Gerald—who really hadn't tasted wolf meat before this—couldn't help but exclaim, "My god! Wolf meat is delicious! It's unlike anything I've ever tasted before!"

While the tastiness was definitely a plus, even if it wasn't delicious, Gerald would've eaten the meat anyway. After all, the goal was just to fill their bellies.

Either way, once they had their fill, the two put the fire out before getting to their feet, ready to resume their journey.

However, at that moment, the rustling of leaves could be heard... Alerted by the sound, Gerald quickly pulled Juno along and hid in a nearby bush.

It wasn't long after before a few odd and fragile-looking humanoids came out from the forest...

Shocked by what they were seeing, Gerald and Juno then watched on as the creatures surrounded what remained of the wolf's corpse before gnawing at its bones!

Judging from the way they were devouring the corpse's raw meat and sucking its blood, Gerald suddenly had an idea what they could be.

Could... those be feral vampires?

“Gerald...? Do you have any idea what those monsters are...?” asked the confused Juno.

“If my guess is correct... They’re feral vampires!” muttered Gerald.

Upon hearing that, Juno gasped loudly though she managed to stop herself from screaming.

Unfortunately, that was all it took for the feral vampires to realize that they weren’t alone.

Watching as the feral vampires began looking around, Gerald knew for a fact that it was only a matter of time before they got discovered.

With that in mind, he then grabbed Juno’s arm before whispering, “We’ve been found! We need to run!”

Before Juno could even reply, Gerald was already tugging her along as he bolted from the scene.

Naturally, this instantly caught the feral vampires’ attention!

Roaring ferociously as they gave chase, the sight of a living human that promised fresh blood was simply too much of a temptation for these blood-craving creatures!

And thus began the game of cat and mouse between the duo and the feral vampires.

With how fast the feral vampires naturally were, all of them soon caught up with Gerald and Juno!

Realizing that they had been surrounded, the terrified Juno couldn't help but worriedly ask, "W-what now, Gerald...?"

"Don't worry, I'm here!" comforted Gerald as the glaring feral vampires continued growling like beasts at the two humans...There was simply no easy way out of this.

The very next second, the four feral vampires began their assault on Gerald and Juno!

Watching as their claws extended toward the duo, Gerald quickly summoned his Astrabyss Sword before slashing the first feral vampire that got too close!

And just like that, the feral vampire that was slashed was cut clean in half!

With blood spewing out of their dead brethren, the other three feral vampires instantly began backing off. After all, they now knew that Gerald's sword was not to be taken lightly.

"Come at me if you're not afraid to die!" growled Gerald as he glared at the remaining feral vampires.

Seemingly understanding what he had just said, the trio then turned around before bolting off.

While the crisis was now lifted, Gerald had come to learn that those feral vampires were actually rather timid. After all, they were easily scared and fled so quickly.

Regardless, Gerald then put away his sword before saying, "Alright, let's leave this place before those feral vampires come back!"

With that, the duo resumed their journey with Gerald taking the lead... and half an hour later, they

finally made it out of the forest.

Once they were outside, Gerald immediately took his phone out. Finally, some reception!

He had earlier planned to contact Ray and the others, though the forest naturally prevented him from calling. Whatever the case was, there was reception now so it was high time he finally tried to contact Ray so that they could regroup.

To Gerald's dismay, Ray wasn't picking up. Frowning slightly, he then tried a few more times. In the end, however, the result remained the same...

The fact that there was beeping as the call tried to connect meant that Ray definitely had reception. So why wasn't he picking Gerald's call up...?

Thinking about it, there were only two possibilities as to why this was, the first being that Ray and the others hadn't noticed the call. The second, however, meant that they could very well have gotten themselves into trouble and were unable to answer...

While it was unfortunate, Gerald had a hunch that the second possibility made more sense...

After all, Ray was addicted to gadgets, so there was no way he would ever ignore his phone. The fact that Ray still wasn't answering even though he had reception only solidified Gerald's theory that something must have happened to them.

Seeing that Gerald was still trying to call Ray—after quite a while—the concerned Juno was prompted to ask, "...Do... You think something's happened to them, Gerald...?"

Furrowing his brow slightly at the thought of it, Gerald's expression darkened as he nodded while saying, "...That's very possible, especially since we've bumped into feral vampires here. I have a sneaking suspicion that Ray and the others must have encountered them as well!"

“...W-what? Then, they...” exclaimed Juno, her heart feeling heavy.

“Don’t worry, Old Flint’s with them. If anyone knows how to deal with feral vampires, it’s him! With that in mind, the feral vampires shouldn’t be able to hurt them that easily!” replied Gerald, attempting to reassure Juno though he wasn’t all that sure about their safety either. Still, he simply didn’t want Juno to worry too much about them at the moment.

After all, the important thing now was to try regrouping with them.

With that in mind, the duo immediately began searching for their party members at the edge of the forest.

Not long after, they managed to come across a bag that looked strikingly similar to Ray’s... Upon rummaging through it, they found his mobile phone. With that in mind, the bag undoubtedly belonged to Ray...

No wonder he hadn’t answered any of Gerald’s calls... He had been separated from his bag and phone!

While they at least knew why he hadn’t been picking up now, Gerald and Juno were also much surer that something terrible must’ve happened to their other party members...

Chapter 1777

The very next morning, Gerald took Rey with him and set off.

“Where are we headed to this early in the morning, Gerald?” asked the puzzled Rey.

He hadn’t been able to get a good night’s sleep in the past few days, and when he was finally able to sleep in his own bed, Gerald had come early in the morning to drag him out! It truly made him feel helpless.

“We’re going to the Dark Sect of Ghost City!” replied Gerald.

As they talked on, they soon arrived at the tower of the Dark Sect of Ghost City...

Since the manhunt for the Ember Lord was still on, the construction of the Dark Sect had been put to a halt, leaving the entire tower sealed. Due to that sudden halt, however, many people ended up losing their jobs.

Just as the saying went, ‘Karma would always come back to bite’.

Regardless, upon stepping before the tower’s entrance, both of them found that the door had been locked with chains. There was even a strip seal attached to it!

“How do you propose we get in, brother Gerald?” asked Rey.

Giving no response, Gerald simply walked around the tower, looking here and there until eventually, he found an air vent connected to the back of the tower.

Removing the lid, Gerald then began squeezing into it! Seeing that, Rey knew that all he could do was follow...

After crawling for a while, the duo eventually made their way into the tower's third-floor bathrooms.

Knowing that the Ember Lord's chamber was on the sixteenth floor, Gerald then headed for the stairs and began running all the way up! Even after running all the way to the top, however, Gerald's face barely reddened, nor did his heart race. In fact, he didn't even feel the need to gasp for air!

Rey, on the other hand, found himself lagging far behind. Taking at least ten minutes to get to where Gerald was, Rey immediately flopped onto a nearby couch the second he saw one.

Gasping for air, Rey then muttered, "C-could we... please... not go so fast next time...? I'm dying here...!"

He really had no idea how Gerald could just bolt up sixteen floors of stairs... It was simply an inhuman feat!

Then again, Gerald wasn't a regular human to begin with. By this point, he was already a half-phantom, so his body no longer functioned like a regular human's. With that said, sixteen floors of stairs were nothing to him.

Regardless, Gerald didn't bother replying to Rey's statement and instead began looking for clues about the Ember Lord within the chamber.

After what Juno had told him the day before, Gerald knew that he couldn't afford to remain passive anymore. They had to take the initiative to make the Ember Lord come to them, and the only way that was going to happen was if Gerald managed to find something that the Ember Lord cared about.

Once he managed to get his hands on such a thing, Gerald would surely be able to catch him.

Either way, after searching for a while, Gerald eventually managed to find a small wooden box in the chamber. It was just a simple-looking old box that didn't look particularly special. Even so, the fact that Ember Lord—a person with such high status—would even possess such a normal-looking box was strange in itself.

With that in mind, Gerald figured that the wooden box must certainly contain something important to the Ember Lord, and that he must have forgotten to take it with him.

Immediately opening the box to see if he was right, Gerald was greeted by the sight of a ring made of green jade... With how dull the jade ring looked, it was clear that it was extremely old...

After examining the ring for a bit longer, Gerald then placed it back into the wooden box before slipping the box into his pocket with the intent of bringing it back with him.

At that moment, a furious voice could suddenly be heard shouting, "Who's there?"

Hearing that, Gerald and Rey instantly turned to look at the door... only to realize that it was Old Flint and a few other men!

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Chapter 1778

Realizing that it was only Old Flint, Gerald and Rey breathed a sigh of relief.

Old Flint, on the hand, couldn't help but raise a slight brow as he puzzledly asked, "...It's you two? What are you doing here? And how did you get in?"

The chief inspector had already ordered him not to have any contact with Gerald anymore. What more, he had also been told that Gerald wasn't allowed to help them in the investigation any longer. With that in mind, Old Flint could only obey his superiors.

"We're here looking for clues!" replied Gerald.

"Look, I'm sorry, but you two aren't allowed to get involved with this case anymore. With that in mind, please leave! If you return here again our only option will be to take you back with us!" warned Old Flint.

Hearing that, Gerald simply nodded.

Not wanting to make things difficult for the old man, Gerald then replied, "Copy that!"

Just as he was about to leave with Rey, however, he heard Old Flint yelling, "Hold on a minute! Did you find any clues while you were here? If you did, please hand them to us!"

Smiling subtly, Gerald then shook his head before saying, "Sorry, Old Flint, but we didn't manage to find any!"

With that, the duo then left the tower...

Who was Old Flint kidding? As if Gerald would ever hand over the clue he found to him!

Whatever the case was, now that they had left the Dark Sect of Ghost City, Gerald and Ray quickly returned to their office...

It was only once they were inside when Gerald took the jade ring out of the wooden box again.

Staring at Gerald, the puzzled Rey couldn't help but ask, "...Is there something special about that jade ring? Why did you feel the need to bring it back here...?"

Hearing that, Gerald then replied, "Just think about it. Why would a person with such high status as him keep such an old jade ring around? Don't you find that odd?"

It was then when Rey realized that what Gerald had said was true.

At that moment, Juno entered the room before saying, "That jade ring should belong to an old person!"

"And where's this coming from?" asked Gerald as he looked at her.

"Well, not only does the ring look weathered, but the carvings on it are also extremely old-fashioned! My grandma used to wear a similar ring, you see, which is why I feel that the wearer must be old as well!" explained Juno.

Upon hearing that, Gerald felt that her statement made sense.

With that information, Gerald assumed that the ring once belonged to the Ember Lord's grandmother, though she later passed it down to him.

"...I mean, that's nice and all, but even if we have the ring, we may not be able to catch the Ember Lord, right...?" muttered Rey.

"...No. I believe that this jade ring will surely help us find him! In fact, I already know who his next victim will be!" declared Gerald in a confident tone.

Following that, he walked right out of the office, and Rey could only follow behind him.

Once they were downstairs, Gerald threw his car keys at Rey before saying, "You drive. Our destination is the Census Bureau!"

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Chapter 1779

"Hello? What is it, Gerald?" asked Old Flint from the other side of the line.

"Old Flint, while I know you can't let us join the investigation, I hope you can still help us out. Essentially, if you want to solve the case and capture the Ember Lord, listen closely and believe me when I say that everything that I'm about to tell you is going to be extremely important!" replied Gerald in a serious tone.

Hearing that, Old Flint paused for a moment. Eventually, however, he knew he could trust Gerald, so he was willing to risk it. After all, both of them wanted the case to be solved and have the Ember Lord be captured.

“...Alright, tell me how I can help!”

“Head to the Census Bureau now. I’m currently heading over as well, and I’ll tell you more about it when we meet!” replied Gerald before hanging the call up.

Half an hour later, Rey and Gerald met up with Old Flint at the assigned venue.

“What are we even here for, Gerald...?” asked the confused old man.

“Look, I need you to do a background check on the Ember Lord as well as his family, and not just his parents either. I need you to thoroughly research anyone related to his parents as well!” ordered Gerald without giving so much as an explanation as to why.

Even so, Old Flint knew that Gerald must have his reasons for asking for that. With that in mind, the old man then said, “...Copy that!”

Shortly after, Old Flint then entered the bureau. Gerald needed the old man’s help since only someone with his credibility was allowed to access and retrieve the information and profiles of others...

It was about an hour later when Old Flint finally exited the bureau with a thick stack of papers.

Getting into the car, he then handed the papers to Gerald before saying, "Here's everything about the Ember Lord and his family, including the information about his parents and grandparents!"

Hearing that, Gerald immediately began scanning through the documents, his reading speed faster than someone skimming across the pages of a book.

With how serious Gerald was, Old Flint couldn't help but ask, "...What exactly did you discover, Gerald...?"

Gerald, however, simply ignored the old man and continued breezing through the papers... until eventually, Gerald stopped.

Pulling out a file that was labeled, 'Yamilet Faes', he then showed it to Old Flint.

Yamilet Faes was none other than the Ember Lord's grandmother. Even so, she passed away about three years ago. Everything in the file was information from about two years ago...

"...Am... I supposed to understand something from this...?" asked the puzzled old man.

Following that, Gerald immediately stated Yamilet Fae's address before saying, "Rey, check if the coordinates of the address match the numbers left behind by the Ember Lord!"

Hearing that, Rey quickly took his tablet out and began searching for the address... and sure enough, once the results came out, the numbers left by the Ember Lord truly seemed to be the coordinates of his grandmother's home!

“You... You’re right! The numbers are exactly the same!” exclaimed Rey as he looked at Gerald and Old Flint.

Hearing that, Gerald and Old Flint exchanged glances with each other. They finally knew what the numbers represented!

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Chapter 1780

There was no way in hell that those two facts could be coincidences. With that in mind, that could only mean that the Ember Lord was hiding there.

However, since the Ember Lord had left that hint for them, it was possible that instead of finding him there, they would instead find the location of his next victim.

After thinking about it for a while, Old Flint then started the car and immediately stepped on the gas! They needed to head to Yamilet Fae’s home right now!

“Are you really sure that the Ember Lord will be hiding there, Gerald...?” asked Rey on their way there.

Shaking his head, Gerald then replied with a serious expression, “To be quite honest, I’m not too sure. After all, the Ember Lord is a meticulous person who never plays by the rules. My guess is that the numbers will lead us to the next victim, but in finding that victim, we’ll surely get one step closer to where the Ember Lord is hiding!”

Hearing that, Rey then nodded in understanding...

After about forty minutes of driving, the trio finally arrived at the Ember Lord's grandmother's house.

Yamilet lived in a small, remote village, and the trio soon found themselves walking along the road in the village.

Since they didn't meet anyone along the way, it was quickly made evident that the village had very few residents. What more, despite the fact that there were quite a number of houses in the area, many of them were locked and showed signs of being unoccupied for a rather long time...

Then again, it wasn't all that surprising. After all, the city was much better developed than this place. With that in mind, who would be willing to continue suffering in such a place when they could live in much better homes?

Regardless, after walking for quite a while, they finally came across a plainly dressed person. With how old his clothes looked, all three of them assumed that he was just a farmer living here.

"Hello there!" called out Old Flint.

Hearing that, the old man instantly turned to face the trio, looking rather surprised that outsiders would even come to this village.

"...Yes? Who... are you?" asked the old man, sounding slightly frightened.

"Don't worry, I'm just from the Grand Council! Cutting straight to the chase, I'd like to know if you know where Yamilet lives?" replied Old Flint.

Hearing that Old Flint was from the Grand Council, the farmer lowered his guard before asking, "...I'm sorry, who...?"

"Yamilet Faes! She's an old lady!" repeated Old Flint.

"Oh, you're looking for her? She passed away some time ago! Do you have business with her...?" asked the farmer.

Of course, Old Flint and the other two already knew that she was dead.

"We know about that, but we still need to go to her home. There's something we need there!" explained Old Flint.

"Oh! Well, if that's the case, I'll bring you there!" replied the old farmer as he cheerfully agreed to help.

Delighted, Old Flint then replied, "I'm glad to hear that! Thank you, good sir!"

Now that someone was leading the way, they didn't have to go looking around for her place anymore.

With the farmer's guidance, all three of them soon arrived at Yamilet Faes's home.

While it was a simple wooden cottage that had fallen into disrepair over the years, the door still appeared to be locked.

Looking at the state of the house, Ray couldn't help but mutter, "...I... don't think the Ember Lord would hide in such a shabby and creepy place, Gerald...!"

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Chapter 1781

"Hehe, Rey, don't forget that Ember Lord is no longer a human. He's even creepier than a ghost. Do you think he will be scared hiding in this place?"

Gerald chuckled and reminded Rey.

When Rey heard him, he found that it somehow made sense.

"You can take a look, and I shall leave, then!"

The old man said to the three.

"Okay, old man. Thanks a lot for your help!"

Old Flint thanked the old man quickly.

"Don't mention it!"

The old man responded by waving his hand.

After the old man had left, Gerald and the other two stood in front of the wooden cottage, staring at it blankly.

They didn't know what to do. They couldn't enter the cottage, nor did they know how to get into it.

"Gerald, Old Flint, what should we do now? Kick the door open?"

Rey looked at Gerald and Old Flint and asked.

"No, that's nonsense. Trespassing is not right!"

Old Flint stopped Rey immediately.

Although Yamilet Faes was no longer alive, this cottage still belonged to her. So, they could not simply do what they wanted.

"Then, what should we do? We don't have the key."

Rey sighed helplessly.

"We'll wait until nighttime and see if Ember Lord will make an appearance here!"

After a while, Gerald suggested.

And so, they just waited there just as Gerald had suggested.

The wait lasted for a few hours.

They waited until eight o'clock, but still, Ember Lord did not appear.

The whole surrounding fell into darkness and stillness.

Being in such a dark environment could really intensify the fear in one's heart.

Apart from Gerald, Rey and Old Flint shrunk their necks and pulled their clothes tighter.

"Gerald, it's been so long. It's so dark already, do we still have to wait?"

Rey looked at Gerald and asked.

"Yeah. Gerald. Why don't we get back into the car? It's at least better than staying in the cold like this!"

Old Flint, who was beside them, quickly made a suggestion.

When Gerald heard this, he nodded in agreement.

Seeing Gerald agree, Old Flint and Rey instantly felt delighted.

After that, the three got up and were ready to leave.

Just then, a light shone from the woods.

As soon as the light came on, it caught Gerald and the two's attention immediately. They were alerted and squatted down again immediately.

"You three?"

Then, they heard the voice of the old man from just now.

Hearing his voice made the three breathe a sigh of relief.

They had thought that it was someone else. Apparently, it was him.

Gerald and the two got out of the bushes right away.

"Old man, why are you still out wandering around at this late hour?"

Old Flint asked the old man doubtfully.

"I saw that you have been waiting here for so long. So, I came to check on you!"

The old man smiled and answered.

“We’re fine. We’re just waiting for someone here!”

Old Flint hurriedly explained to the old man as he did not want the old man to sense that something was wrong. Chapter 1782

“Eh, it’s already so late! I’m sure the person you are waiting for will not come. Come, let’s go to my place and rest!”

The old man sighed and proposed to the three.

When Old Flint heard him, he turned around immediately and looked at Gerald, seeking his opinion.

Gerald saw his reaction and nodded subtly.

Since they had no other choice, for now, they could only rest at the old man’s place.

Besides, the sky was already very dark, and it was not safe. Who knew what would be lingering outside?

After the conversation, Gerald and the others followed the old man and left the wooden cottage.

The old man brought Gerald and the others to his house. Although it was not very old, it looked like it should have been rebuilt before.

“Old man, are you the only one left in the village?”

Once they were in the old man’s house, Old Flint asked curiously.

“Hehe!” The old man chuckled.

“Yes. The others have moved into the cities already. I’m the only one left here!”

After he chuckled, he answered.

“Then, why didn’t you move into the city? Isn’t it more comfortable living in the city?”

Old Flint continued to ask.

“Alas, I have no relatives or children. I don’t want to live in the city anyway. It’s good living here. I’m used to living here!” The old man spoke with a bitter smile.

They could hear the helplessness in the old man’s voice.

Having no family member at an old age was indeed pitiful.

Perhaps this was the destiny of this old man. He was destined to live in the mountains for his whole life. It was not bad for fallen leaves to return to their roots.

“Right, who are you waiting for actually?”

The old man asked Old Flint.

“Old man, did you know that Yamilet Faes has a grandson named Ember Lord?”

After a pause, Old Flint asked the old man.

Once the old man heard that, he was startled for a moment, and then he said, “Yes, I know him. Speaking about Ember Lord, he is indeed a good young lad. He was the one who spent money to help me rebuild my house. He used to be an obedient boy. Sometimes, he would stay here with his grandmother. Sometimes, he would come to my place to play with me. However, after his grandmother passed away, he has never come back!”

The old man sighed as he recounted his story.

“Oh? Old man, did you find anything strange lately? Or maybe something happened in the wooden cottage of Yamilet Faes?”

After that, Old Flint asked the old man.

Since the old man knew Ember Lord, the number Ember Lord had given them would not be that simple.

“I didn’t hear anything. I would pass by the wooden cottage every day when I go up and down the hill, but I’ve never heard any noise.”

The old man said to Old Flint.

“You guys are asking about it so much. What is happening here exactly? What has Ember Lord done?”

The old man asked in confusion.

“It’s nothing, old man. We’re his friends. It’s just that we couldn’t keep in touch with him lately, so we wanted to come here and check if he is here!”

Old Flint quickly made up an excuse to explain it to the old man.

“Oh, I see.”

After the old man heard his explanation, he didn’t suspect anything and simply nodded his head.

Gerald and the others sat in the house until late at night.

However, none of them fell asleep.

It wasn’t that they didn’t want to, but it was because they didn’t dare to.

If they fell asleep, nobody knew what would happen, much less if Ember Lord would appear.

Creak!

Suddenly, the door was opened.

After the sound of the door being opened was heard, the sound of the door being closed was heard immediately after.

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Chapter 1783

The three quickly looked outside only to see that the old man had left the house alone, carrying a basket with him as he headed toward Yamilet Faes' wooden cottage.

Seeing this, the three exchanged glances.

They found it rather strange that the old man would want to go out in the middle of the night carrying a basket. There had to be some secret unknown to people hidden behind it.

Soon after, Gerald and the two got out of the house and followed the old man quietly.

They followed the old man all the way to the wooden cottage. Then, they saw him take out a key from his pocket to unlock the door.

Once the door was unlocked, the old man surveyed his surroundings carefully. After making sure that no one was around, only then did he push the door open and walk in with reassurance.

Gerald and the two others also walked to the wooden cottage immediately and stood in front of it.

“Gerald, it looks like the old man must be hiding something from us. He actually has the key to this house!”

Rey whispered to Gerald.

Now, it could be seen that the old man was not as simple as he looked. He must have some kind of relationship with Ember Lord.

“Rey, Old Flint, you two should hide. I’ll go in and take a look first!”

Later, Gerald instructed Rey and Old Flint.

Hearing his words, Rey and Old Flint did not object, Instead, they nodded in agreement right away. Then, they quickly retreated to a bush nearby and hid in there.

As for Gerald, he went to the side of the wooden cottage and sat beside the wall. Then, he freed his soul from his body.

Of course Gerald would not enter the house directly. Otherwise, he would alert them and be discovered by the old man.

Once he had freed his soul, Gerald went into the wooden cottage and started searching up and down.

When he went upstairs, he could hear the old man’s voice. It sounded as though he was talking to someone.

Soon, after the old man finished talking, the voice of Ember Lord was heard.

Gerald knew it was him the moment he heard his voice. Ember Lord had indeed hidden in this place.

Gerald didn't expect that this old man was hiding it so well and that he indeed had a relationship with Ember Lord.

"Ember Lord, those three who are looking for you must be looking for trouble with you, right?"

The old man asked.

Ember Lord sat on the chair and snorted.

"Hmph, those three want to catch me. It looks like they are smart enough to find this place!"

"It's not that we are smart, but it was you who gave us the clue, Ember Lord!"

The moment Ember Lord finished talking, Gerald's voice rang in the room. Then, Gerald appeared in front of Ember Lord and the old man.

"Gerald Crawford!"

At the sight of Gerald, Ember Lord was enraged.

He yelled angrily and charged toward Gerald, wanting to tear Gerald into pieces.

Gerald reacted quickly and kicked Ember Lord away.

Now, since Gerald was also a half-phantom, he was not afraid of Ember Lord at all. Everything had to come to an end today.

“Ember Lord, I am not going to let you escape again today!”

Gerald glared at Ember Lord and said.

Having said that, Gerald threw out the Soul Chain in his hand.

The Soul Chain flew toward Ember Lord and bound him tightly.

Of course, Ember Lord wasn't that easy to deal with. He morphed into a black miasma and charged toward Gerald.

Gerald summoned his Astrabyss Sword swiftly and sent out a spirit blade toward Ember Lord.

When the old man saw this, he ran forward and threw himself in front of the black miasma, not wanting to let Gerald's spirit blade hurt Ember Lord.

Swish!

The spirit blade passed through the body of the old man.

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Chapter 1784

At the same time, the black miasma of Ember Lord wrapped around the old man.

Soon after, the black miasma absorbed the soul and energy of the old man, directly turning the old man into a dry corpse.

This surprised Ember Lord very much. He didn't expect this would be the outcome. Moreover, he never expected that the old man would actually block the attack from Gerald for him.

"Ember Lord, you've killed another innocent person again!"

Gerald shouted at Ember Lord angrily.

Having said that, Gerald decided to use his forbidden technique to completely destroy Ember Lord.

At this moment, Ember Lord had totally lost consciousness. He stood there motionlessly, almost as if he had lost his soul.

"Thousand Sect Destruction Technique!"

Gerald shouted and threw the Astrabyss Sword in his hand directly at Ember Lord.

When the sword pierced into Ember Lord's body, it immediately emitted a bright light and engulfed Ember Lord completely.

"Argh!"

Ember Lord shrieked.

The next second, Ember Lord was turned into ashes.

At last, Gerald had wiped out Ember Lord.

Finally, Gerald had avenged the villagers of Moonset Village.

When they heard the commotion in the wooden cottage, Old Flint rushed in with Rey and went straight to the second floor.

When they saw the dry corpse of the old man and a pile of ashes, they were extremely shocked.

"This... What is going on here?!"

They didn't see Gerald anywhere.

After a few seconds, Gerald came from downstairs.

“Huh? Gerald, why did you come in from outside? Didn’t you come inside already?”

Old Flint stared at Gerald in surprise and asked.

“I’ve finished off Ember Lord!”

Gerald did not answer. Instead, he pointed to the pile of ashes and told Old Flint.

Old Flint looked at the pile of ashes with a surprised look on his face.

“Are you telling me that this is Ember Lord?!”

Old Flint asked again in disbelief.

Gerald nodded. Then, he turned around and left the house.

Old Flint and Rey exchanged glances, but they did not bother saying anything else. They just followed him out.

After leaving the wooden cottage, the three returned to their car.

Once they got into the car, they started the engine and left the village immediately.

At long last, Ember Lord was dead, and Gerald could finally breathe a sigh of relief.

“Old Flint, please send us home. You have been working very hard lately. This matter is finally considered settled!”

Sitting in the car, Gerald looked at Old Flint, who was driving, and said.

Old Flint nodded in agreement when he heard him.

Of course he knew what Gerald meant.

“Thank you, Gerald!”

Old Flint thanked Gerald as well.

If it wasn't because of the clue Gerald had found, they wouldn't have found this place at all, and they wouldn't have been able to find Ember Lord and finish him.

Although Old Flint was someone from the Grand Council, he agreed with Gerald's way of tackling this matter.

After all, Ember Lord deserved to die, and his death was not regrettable at all.

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Chapter 1785

The next morning, as Gerald and Rey were still sleeping, the doorbell woke them up.

Rey walked out of the room to the door half asleep and opened it.

Once the door was opened, he saw a few men in uniforms standing outside. At the sight of the logo on their uniforms, he knew that they were from the Grand Council.

“Excuse me, are Mr. Gerald Crawford and Mr. Rey Leighton here?”

One of the inspectors entered the house and asked.

Rey nodded and replied, “I’m Rey. What is it?”

“Take him away!”

Once he heard Rey’s words, the inspector ordered his men, and immediately, two inspectors came forward and grabbed Rey’s arms, dragging him outside.

“Hey, what are you doing?!”

Rey shouted immediately.

The commotion woke Gerald, Juno, and Nori up.

They got out of their rooms quickly.

“Who are you?”

When Gerald came out, he looked at the people from the Grand Council in surprise and asked.

“You must be Mr. Gerald Crawford. We suspect that you are related to the death of Chief Lake, who is also known as Old Flint. So, we want to bring you back for an investigation now!”

As the inspector was talking, he took out an arrest warrant and showed it to Gerald.

“Wait. What did you say? Chief Lake is dead?!”

Gerald was stunned when he heard this.

This news was really too surprising to Gerald.

They had still been with Old Flint early this morning. How could he be dead now?! This was simply too bizarre.

“Mr. Crawford, I hope you will cooperate with us!”

The inspector was well aware of Gerald's identity. So, he maintained a gentle tone when he was talking to Gerald.

"Alright. Please let us get dressed before going with you!"

Gerald had no problem with it and agreed to it right away.

Soon after, Gerald and Rey got changed and left with the inspectors of the Grand Council.

On the way to the Grand Council, Gerald remained silent in the car.

Old Flint's death was completely unexpected. Gerald truly had no idea how he had died.

It seemed like there was something weird in regards to this.

Soon, Gerald and Rey were brought to the Grand Council and into separate interrogation rooms for questioning.

After a while, two inspectors pushed the door open and sat down.

"Mr. Crawford, can you tell me where you went with Chief Lake last night? What did you do there?"

One of the inspectors stared at Gerald and asked.

"We went to Ember Lord's home last night," Gerald told the inspector.

“What time did you come back?” asked the inspector.

“About two o’clock in the morning. It was Chief Lake who drove us home. After that, he left on his own,” Gerald replied seriously.

“Did you two stay in your house after that? Did you go out at all?” questioned the inspector.

Gerald frowned.

“I suggest that you do not waste your time on the two of us. Do you honestly think we would kill Chief Lake? Besides, there are CCTVs along the street where Chief Lake met with the accident. Why don’t you retrieve the footage and watch it?”

Gerald didn’t want to keep on answering the questions anymore, so he asked the inspector in return.

Hearing Gerald’s words, the inspector was speechless.

Indeed, what Gerald had just said did make sense.

In truth, they had brought Gerald and Rey back just to grasp the situation.

No evidence showed that it was Gerald and Rey who had killed Old Flint.

However, apart from the two of them, Old Flint had not had any contact with other people.

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They had indeed watched the CCTV footage.

When the accident happened, there was no one and no other car around. Moreover, Old Flint was the only one in his car.

So, that meant that the situation when Old Flint had met with the accident was utterly bizarre.

In the footage, Old Flint's car had simply skidded and rolled out of control on its own all of a sudden.

Gerald and Rey were only released in the afternoon.

They took a cab back to the office once they had left the Grand Council.

On the way back, Rey looked at Gerald with a very puzzled look and asked, "Gerald, what do you think of Old Flint's death? How did he die?"

Gerald's face was very grave. He was not sure about it either. However, he was sure that the incident was certainly not that simple.

"Does this mean Ember Lord is not dead yet?"

The next second, a bold idea came across Rey's mind.

Gerald felt that the possibility of this speculation was very tiny. After all, Ember Lord had died before his eyes. How could he still be alive?

“Let’s go back first. Maybe it really was just an accident!”

Gerald told Rey.

Soon, they arrived back at the office.

“Gerald, Rey, you two are back! Are you alright?”

Seeing them return, Juno hurried forward and asked them in concern.

When they were taken away by the people from the Grand Council, it had really made Juno and Nori worry.

But now, seeing them return safe and sound, they were relieved.

“We’re fine. We just went there to help with the investigation!”

Gerald smiled gently and explained to Juno.

“By the way, did you guys find Ember Lord this time?”

Juno handed a glass of water over to Gerald and asked.

Gerald took the water and took a sip. He answered, "We found him, and I have killed him!"

Hearing this, Juno instantly felt relieved, seeing as the murderous monster had finally been exterminated.

"But what about Old Flint's death? I saw the news just now, saying that his death was very strange. It doesn't seem to be caused by a human?"

Immediately afterward, Juno got curious again and asked.

"I'm not sure about that. When we came back last night, Old Flint was still fine. Nothing special happened along the way."

Gerald said with a gloomy face.

Everything that had happened made people feel rather uncomfortable.

"Sigh."

Juno sighed heavily when she heard what Gerald had said.

Knock! Knock! Knock!

Right at that moment, someone knocked at the door of the office.

“Rey, go and see who it is.”

When Gerald heard it, he told Rey to answer the door.

Rey stood up and walked to the door, only to see a delivery boy standing outside.

He opened the door and walked out.

“Hello, does Mr. Gerald Crawford live here? There’s a parcel for him!”

The delivery boy said to Rey with a smiling face.

“Yes.”

Rey replied immediately and signed for the parcel.

“Gerald, there’s a parcel for you!”

Rey told Gerald when he came back.

“A parcel for me?”

Gerald was puzzled when he heard him. He hadn’t bought anything. Why would he receive a parcel?

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The parcel was a small square box.

Gerald shook the box gently, but there wasn't any sound coming from the box.

"Let's see who sent it to you!"

Juno, who was sitting at the side, reminded Gerald.

Gerald quickly checked the information on the sender. Apart from his name and address, there was no information about the sender.

Gerald and the others were baffled by what they were seeing. Who could have sent Gerald the parcel? What exactly was in the parcel?

Gerald was not in a rush to open the parcel. He felt that there was a problem with it. Maybe, it was a scheme.

"Back off, you guys!"

Gerald told his friends.

Upon hearing Gerald's words, Rey and the girls stood up immediately and moved backward.

Gerald picked up a small knife and slashed the box open with extreme precision.

Once the box had been slashed, the lid popped open.

Gerald looked at the box carefully. After making sure it was safe, only then was he relieved, and he signaled his friends to come forward.

The three walked toward Gerald and stood beside him once more.

“Gerald, what exactly is in the box?”

Rey asked curiously.

Gerald put down the small knife. Then, he grabbed the box and opened it.

There was only a purple envelope in the box.

“It’s a purple envelope again!”

When Rey saw the envelope, he yelled in surprise.

The purple envelopes would keep on appearing when Ember Lord was still alive. Now that he was dead, they didn’t expect that it would appear again.

“Gerald, isn’t Ember Lord dead already? Why is this purple envelope appearing again?!”

Rey asked Gerald, looking at him in disbelief.

Gerald also cocked his eyebrows. He looked very serious.

He reckoned this incident was certainly not simple, as if everything had not ended yet.

“Come, let’s go to the courier company!”

Soon after, Gerald regained his senses and suggested to Rey.

Then, Gerald left the office with Rey and headed to the courier company. He wanted to know who had sent him the parcel.

After a short while, they arrived at the courier company.

Once they entered the office, Gerald started looking for the person-in-charge.

“Hello, may I know who sent me this parcel?”

Gerald handed the box to the person-in-charge and asked.

When the person-in-charge took the parcel, he said something that made Gerald and Rey dumbfounded.

“This courier box is not our company’s courier box, and the packaging is not either!” He said to the two.

“What? It’s not your company’s courier box? How can this be?! It was clearly delivered by a delivery boy from your company just now.”

Rey told the person-in-charge immediately.

Seeing as Gerald and Rey refused to believe him, the person-in-charge brought them into his office.

“Look. This is the standard courier box and packaging of our company. So, this box is really not from our company!”

The person-in-charge pointed at the boxes and explained to them.

Now, Gerald and Rey were completely perplexed.

If the parcel wasn’t from this company, where did it come from?

“Can I meet the delivery boy who sent us the box just now?”

Then, Gerald proposed to the person-in-charge.

“Sure, no problem!”

The person-in-charge was very helpful and agreed to it right away.

Soon, he called the delivery boy out for Gerald and Rey.

“Rey, is he the one?” Chapter 1788

Gerald looked at the delivery boy and asked Rey.

“Yes, that’s right, Gerald. It was him who sent the parcel.”

Rey nodded firmly and said.

“What’s wrong? Is there any problem, misters?”

The delivery boy standing in front of them asked in puzzlement, not knowing what was happening.

“Let me ask you. This parcel was delivered by you just now. Where did you get it from?”

Gerald stared at the delivery boy and questioned him.

The delivery boy took the box from Gerald and took a look.

“That’s right. It was me who delivered the parcel. I also wondered why there was only the receiver’s name and address on the parcel, and the packaging was different. I asked about it for almost a day, but no one bothered to answer me, so I could only deliver it according to the address!”

The delivery boy admitted that he was the one who had delivered the parcel, but he himself did not know who the sender was.

Upon hearing this, Gerald and Rey exchanged glances.

The investigation came to halt once more. The clue didn't help them to find out the sender.

"Okay. Thanks for the trouble!"

Later, Gerald thanked the delivery boy and left with Rey.

"Gerald, do you think Ember Lord is truly dead?"

When they were in the car, Rey asked Gerald again.

"It's impossible that he's not. I witnessed his death with my own eyes. How could he still be alive?"

Gerald denied Rey's speculation directly. He didn't believe Ember Lord was still alive.

"Then, this..."

"Forget it. We'll go back and see what's written in the letter first."

Left with no choice, Gerald could only choose to study the purple envelope first.

If Gerald had guessed it correctly, there should be numbers on the letter, just like the previous one.

When they got back to the office, Gerald immediately opened the purple envelope.

At the sight of it, Gerald was totally baffled. He had guessed it wrongly this time. There wasn't any number on it, but a pattern of the Star of David.

"It's a pattern? It's not the same as before!"

Gerald exclaimed when he saw it, his face full of disbelief. It was indeed different this time.

Looking at the pattern of the Star of David, Gerald sank into contemplation.

Immediately afterward, Rey searched for information about the Star of David online.

"Gerald, this is all the information about the Star of David. You can take a look!"

Rey handed the tablet over to Gerald.

Gerald took the tablet and started reading when he heard that.

After reading for a while, Gerald's face started turning dark.

And right at that moment, Gerald's phone rang.

Gerald fished out his phone and found that it was an unknown number.

After hesitating for a while, he answered the call.

"Hello. Who's this?"

Once the call was connected, Gerald asked the caller in a deep voice, only to hear a man's sinister voice on the other end of the phone.

"Mr. Crawford, you should have received the present I sent you!"

When Gerald heard his voice, he frowned.

"Who are you?"

Gerald asked the man on the other end of the phone.

"Hehe, don't be so nervous.! I'm just a nobody who wants to play a game with you!"

The man laughed wickedly and said to Gerald without telling Gerald his identity.

"Play a game? Hmph, I have no time to play with you. If you are trying to play a prank, sorry, you have the wrong person!"

Gerald snorted coldly when he heard what the man had said.

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Chapter 1789

“Gerald, who was it?” Rey looked at Gerald and asked.

“I don’t know. It was a man. He was the one who sent the letter, and he told me that he wants to play a game with me. He’s nuts!” Gerald said helplessly.

What time was it already that he still wanted to play a game with him?! Gerald didn’t want to bother so much about this.

It had indeed made them a little anxious to the point that they had thought it was Ember Lord and he had not died.

As for the identity of this man, Gerald was uninterested to know about it.

After hearing what Gerald had said, the three did not ask any more questions. They felt that it might just be a prank.

However, everything was not as simple as Gerald had thought.

That day, Gerald brought Rey out to buy some groceries.

They had not been able to rest properly for a long time. So, they decided to buy some good food and cook a hearty meal together.

Gerald and Rey went to the supermarket. When they came out, both of them were carrying two big bags in their hands.

Boom!

Suddenly, a loud explosion was heard.

The impact of the explosion was so strong that the entire surrounding was shaken. The glass of countless cars and shops was shattered by the explosion.

As for Gerald and Rey, they were thrown to the ground by the force. Everything in their hands scattered all over the place.

That's right. A car not far away from them had exploded.

"Gerald, it's our car!"

Rey realized something and looked at the car that had been blown up. Then, he shouted in shock at Gerald.

Gerald got up and went forward to take a look.

At the sight of it, sure enough, it was his car.

At that moment, the car had already been completely destroyed, still burning in the huge fire.

Soon after, people from the Grand Council and the firefighters came to the scene and started examining the car after putting out the fire.

And so, Gerald and Rey were invited to the Grand Council once again.

“After our investigation, we found that someone had installed a kind of fuse in your car. The firefighters found some fragments at the scene. It seems like your car was deliberately tampered with by somebody. Anyway, it’s fortunate that both of you were not in the car and escaped the catastrophe!”

An inspector came in with the documents and explained them to Gerald and Rey.

“Do you know who did this to you?” asked the inspector.

Gerald was startled for a while. Then, he replied, “No. Maybe it was just a prank.”

However, when Gerald said that, not only did the inspector not believe it, even Gerald himself and Rey did not believe it.

Nevertheless, Gerald didn’t want people from the Grand Council to get involved with this. It looked like this incident had something to do with the man who had called him last time.

Now, Gerald was enraged.

He didn't expect that the man would dare to lay hands on him. Since that was the case, Gerald would definitely not let him go.

After that, Gerald and Rey completed the formalities and left the Grand Council, returning to their office by taking a cab.

Seeing the two come back intact, Juno's heavy heart was lightened once more.

Upon receiving the news of the car explosion, they had been very scared and worried.

Ring! Ring!

Just then, Gerald's mobile phone rang.

Gerald didn't even have to guess. He already knew it must be the strange man calling.

He picked up the call right away.

"B*stard, what exactly do you want?! If I find you, I will kill you!"

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Chapter 1790

Gerald cursed at the man angrily.

“Hehe, chill, Mr. Crawford. I was just joking with you. After all, it was you who did not want to play the game with me.”

The man laughed and replied in an eerie voice.

It was just a joke?!

It had been a big explosion, but this man had actually said that it was just a small joke. It was really driving Gerald crazy.

“What exactly do you want to play?”

Gerald calmed himself down and questioned the man over the phone.

“Hehe! Mr. Crawford, I know your ability, and I’m very impressed with your power. So, you are the only one who can play the game with me.

Do you still remember the purple letter? There’s a pattern of the Star of David on the paper.

The pattern represents each different area, and a different thing will happen in each of the areas. It may be a person or a thing, and everything depends on you to discover it yourself.

Right, since it's a game, there must be a win and a loss.

If you win, I will give you the address to save a person so that you can go and save him. Of course, if you lose, the person can only die!"

The strange man explained the rules of the game to Gerald.

"You b*stard! What if I don't agree with it?" Gerald shouted angrily again.

"Ha! Ha! Ha! Mr. Crawford, perhaps you have felt the power of the explosion? If you don't play with me, I can't guarantee where the next explosion will happen.

And you will have to be responsible for the death of those people because you were the cause of their deaths!"

When the strange man heard what Gerald had said, he burst out laughing as he replied.

"Okay, Mr. Crawford. The decision is yours to make. There will be another letter for you tomorrow morning. You can decide whether you want to play with me or not!"

Then, the strange man reminded Gerald once more before hanging up the call. He didn't give Gerald any chance to speak.

Gerald threw his mobile phone away angrily.

“Gerald, what does he want exactly?”

Rey asked, frowning.

“It looks like we have no choice but to play with him!”

Gerald had no other choice but to helplessly compromise.

Moreover, he still did not know the identity of the man. Therefore, he could only look for clues based on what he had told him.

From what he had said, Gerald was sure that the strange men had some hostages in his hands. If Gerald didn't play the game, the hostages would be in danger. By then, Gerald would truly become a sinner.

That night, Gerald didn't sleep, or to be more precise, he couldn't sleep at all.

The next morning, Gerald went to the office alone.

The moment he arrived at the doorway, Gerald saw an envelope lying on the floor in front of the door. It was that familiar purple envelope again.

Gerald picked up the envelope right away. He opened the door and started reading the letter.

Once opened, there was a paper with only one sentence written on it.

'Water flies straight down three thousand feet.'

Seeing this phrase, Gerald fell into confusion.

Wasn't it a phrase from a classical poem?

What did he mean by this?

What was the hidden message behind this?

Soon after, Gerald turned on his computer and started searching for information about the phrase of the poem.

However, Gerald couldn't figure out the meaning of this phrase in the poem at all.

Ding!

Right then, Gerald's phone rang.

Gerald took it out immediately and saw a news message.

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Chapter 1791

Upon looking at the message, Gerald couldn't help but momentarily pause.

“Water that comes crashing down from three thousand feet... Could that be hinting at some kind of waterfall...?”

After thinking about it for a short while, Gerald instantly stepped out of his office—making sure to properly lock the door behind him—before driving off to the newest waterfall in the Leicom Continent. All of this... it couldn't just be pure coincidence.

The clues that the other party provided most probably involved incidents that were happening around Gerald, and if Gerald's thought process was correct, then the old poem was probably hinting that there was a hostage in that area...

Whatever the case was, after about half an hour, Gerald arrived at Durduff Mountain where the newest waterfall was located. The area itself had the largest mountain range in all of the Leicom Continent, leading many tourists to have their vacations here.

Regardless, upon entering the mountain, Gerald blended in with the crowd. After following them for a while, he eventually arrived at the newest waterfall...

Looking up, Gerald saw that it was barely even a hundred feet tall. While it certainly didn't have a height of three thousand feet, Gerald was well aware that the ancient poem's description was simply a hyperbole. After all, did a waterfall spanning three thousand feet even exist?

With that, Gerald immediately resumed looking for hints while everyone else was still aweing at the waterfall.

While looking around, the corner of Gerald's eye caught a glimpse of what appeared to be a rather narrow and mysterious-looking boulevard on the left of the waterfall. From the looks of it, only one person could pass through at a time...

Still, Gerald felt compelled to head there, which was why he immediately did just that...

After walking for a bit, he eventually arrived at the opening of a large cave. Before he could even venture in, however, he suddenly heard someone from inside crying out, "H-help...!"

Hearing how anxious the feminine voice's cries were, Gerald immediately deduced that she was in grave danger. With that, he bolted right toward the source of her voice without any hesitation!

As the screaming grew louder, Gerald soon caught sight of a woman who had been tied to a stone pillar. With water appearing to constantly drip from above her, it certainly explained why she was so drenched.

Running over to free her, Gerald also noticed that both her eyes were bloodshot, signifying just how long she had been trapped here...

Either way, upon seeing Gerald, the overjoyed woman instantly cried out, "H-hello! P-please, save me...!"

Nodding in response, Gerald then retrieved a small knife from his backpack before easily freeing the woman from the rope.

Realizing that she was finally free, the relieved woman instantly hugged Gerald tight.

Not even flinching from that, Gerald didn't beat around the bush and immediately asked, "You're safe now. Regardless, may I know how long you've been trapped in here, miss?"

Hearing that, the woman shook her head before replying, "...That... I'm not too sure, honestly... All I remember is that I was knocked unconscious by someone as I was heading home last night... Upon waking up, I was already here..."

Upon hearing that, Gerald instantly frowned before asking, "...I see. Prior to getting knocked out, are you absolutely sure you didn't come across any weird situations on your way home?"

Shaking her head again—and feeling slightly confused as to why she was being asked all this—the woman then replied, "Not at all. After all, I always get off work at around eight. While it's true that I leave work alone, I also drive, you see, and I make it a habit to go straight home after office hours..."

As Gerald registered her reply, the corner of his eyes suddenly caught a glimpse of what appeared to be a purple envelope that had been slipped into a stone with a tiny crevice on its side...

Raising a slight brow, Gerald then walked over and picked it up.

"...Huh? An envelope...?" mumbled the confused woman.

"...Whatever the case is, you're safe now, miss. Even so, I'll need you to report what happened to you to the Grand Council. Also, please be more careful in the future!"

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Chapter 1792

Gerald had deliberately avoided her question so that she wouldn't ask too much.

Getting the hint, the woman then nodded before quickly leaving the cave.

Seeing that she was now gone, Gerald quickly opened the letter and began reading through it...

'Congratulations on finding the first hostage, Mr. Crawford! Now hurry along and go find where the next hostage is! There's no money hidden here!'

After reading through the letter, Gerald couldn't help but frown. Another ancient poem...? The culprit really enjoyed using ancient poems as clues, didn't he?

Regardless, the hint this time was pretty straightforward. Since the poem included the word 'money', it was only fair to assume that the next hostage could be found in a bank.

However... which bank? There were way too many banks in the Leicom Continent for Gerald to find the right one in such a short amount of time.

Realizing that he wasn't going to get anything done just by speculating here alone, Gerald immediately left the area, intent on studying the clue with Rey back at the office.

The second he got into his car, however, he immediately received a call from an unknown number.

"It appears that you've rescued the first hostage, Mr. Crawford. I'm guessing you've found the purple envelope as well, then?"

While Gerald could tell that the speaker was a male, his voice was weird, to say the least. Whatever the

case was, Gerald then retorted, "I have, also f*ck you. You won't get away with all of this! I'll make sure I capture you if it's the last thing I do!"

Following that, Gerald immediately hung up, not wanting to waste his breath on this strange man.

With that, Gerald then drove Juno's car back to his office. Since his own car had previously been blown up, he could only use hers for the moment...

Regardless, upon entering his office, Gerald was instantly greeted by the sight of Rey and two others inside.

Seeing that Gerald was back, Rey took the chance to ask, "Mr. Crawford, you're back! Where did you head off so early in the morning?"

Since all three of them hadn't seen Gerald all morning, they all had a hunch that he had probably gone off to do some personal investigating.

Either way, despite Rey's question, Gerald simply ordered, "Rey, I need you to immediately start investigating the phrase, 'There's no money hidden here'!"

Not even bothering to ask why, Rey immediately headed to his computer to get to work as he replied, "Loud and clear!"

While Rey was used to not getting immediate answers from Gerald, Juno wasn't. With that in mind, she quickly walked up to him before asking, "What's wrong, Gerald...?"

Hearing that, Gerald retrieved the purple envelope from his pocket before handing it to Juno.

After reading through it, she momentarily appeared shocked, though that was to be expected.

What Gerald hadn't expected, however, was the fact that Juno would suddenly say, "...I... I think I know where the letter is pointing to! If my guess is correct, it should be referring to a bank or a tax building... And there's only one place I can think of where both buildings can be found close together!"

Upon hearing that, Gerald immediately knew the area Juno was referring to. With that in mind, he patted Rey's shoulder before saying, "You heard her. Let's head there right now!"

With that, Gerald and Rey bolted out of the office before speedily driving toward the tax building Juno had talked about.

Since Juno's guess made total sense, Gerald had a feeling that the second hostage was definitely going to be there...

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Chapter 1793

While they were on their way there, Rey couldn't help but ask, "So... mind filling me in, Mr. Crawford...?"

Turning to look at Rey for a moment, Gerald then replied, "Remember that call from yesterday?"

Nodding in response, Rey then said, "I do. That person said he wanted to play a game with you... Don't tell me it's already started?"

“It has. That person has challenged me to rescue six hostages, and I’ve already rescued one this morning. We’re currently on our way to rescue the second one!” explained Gerald.

Hearing that, Rey found himself momentarily speechless. No wonder Gerald hadn’t been around this morning... He had already saved someone while they were still barely awake!

Disregarding how stunned Rey looked, Gerald then added, “Either way, that phrase I told you to investigate earlier, ‘There’s no money being hidden here,’ directly relates to the second hostage’s location, which is why we’re currently targeting the bank near the tax building!”

Just as Gerald completed his explanation, both of them arrived at the entrance of the tax building.

After getting off, the duo began looking around for the bank, and soon enough, they found it. However, since it was the weekend, the bank was closed, and only the self-service bank—at the side—remained open.

“Closed, huh... What should we do now, Mr. Crawford?” mumbled Rey as he looked at Gerald.

“I’m sure the culprit anticipated the bank being closed today as well. With that in mind, the second hostage should be within the only operational part of a bank on a weekend, that being...”

“The self-service bank!” yelled the duo at the same time.

Now that they had come to this conclusion, both men rushed into the self-service bank and immediately began looking around.

A short while later, Rey—who had searched high and low for clues of where the hostage could be—couldn't help but say, "...There doesn't appear to be anyone here, Mr. Crawford... Could we have been mistaken...?"

"Negative. I'm sure Juno made the right guess!" replied Gerald without any hesitation.

The hostage was definitely here. They just hadn't found them yet.

Thankfully, since there weren't too many people around—due to it being the weekend—after the duo went silent for a while, they were able to hear faint knocking sounds coming from behind them!

Turning around, Rey perked his ears... before pointing at one of the ATM machines and shouting, "It's coming from the third ATM, Mr. Crawford!"

Nodding in agreement, both of them then hurried over to the machine...

As Gerald squatted and began investigating the ATM, the duo was caught slightly off guard when they heard a voice coming from the area where one would usually slip their cards into!

The voice itself was feminine, and it was calling out in a weak voice, "H-help... Please..."

Hearing that, Rey instantly yelled, "We've found the second hostage! We really did come to the right place!"

“Indeed, but it’s too early to be celebrating! Go call the Grand Council, Rey! Tell them to send people over to open this machine up!” ordered Gerald.

“Roger that!” replied Rey as he quickly fished his phone out and began calling the Grand Council...

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About half an hour later, people sent by the Grand Council could be seen rushing over alongside a few of the bank’s staff, all of them appearing anxious. After all, it was definitely flabbergasting to learn that a person was locked inside an ATM machine.

After about another ten minutes of prying the ATM open, they finally managed to reveal what was inside...

Just as Gerald and Rey had deduced, there truly was a woman trapped inside! To make matters even more shocking, she was one of the bank’s staff!

Regardless, once the woman was hurriedly sent to the hospital, those sent over by the Grand Council began inspecting the scene...

From what they could gather, the lid—at the back of the machine—had been deliberately welded tightly by the perpetrator...

As they continued investigating, one of the supervisors retrieved a purple envelope from within the machine as he asked, “...Hmm? A letter?”

Hearing that, Gerald immediately took it from him. The supervisor himself made no effort to stop him. After all, Gerald had become quite famous among those in the Grand Council, which explained why he was aware of who Gerald was and why he knew better than to meddle in the youth's business.

In any case, with the letter now in his hands, Gerald then led Ray back into the car...

Once inside, Gerald immediately opened the envelope... but instead of a message, the only thing inside was a pink hairpin...

"...Hmm? A hairpin...?" muttered Gerald as he raised a slight brow.

'This is a new one... Was there really a need to make such a major change in how you give your clues out?' Gerald thought to himself.

While two heads were definitely better than one, neither of them could figure out what the deal was with the hairpin.

Due to that, the duo eventually gave up for the moment and decided to return to the office first. Women would probably know more about hairpins than them, and thankfully, they had Juno and Yrsa on their side. With any luck, they'd be able to decipher the message behind the hairpin...

With that in mind, upon returning to the firm, Gerald instantly handed the hairpin to her before saying, "Say, Juno, have a look at this hairpin. If I wanted to buy something similar, where could I get it?"

Taking the hairpin and frowning slightly, Juno then brought it with her to the computer and quickly began researching it...

Shortly after, she exclaimed, "I've got it! It's a special hairpin that's currently being distributed to all the staff members of one of the banks! They're given out in pairs!"

Hearing that, Rey was momentarily stunned. After gathering his thoughts, he then turned to face Gerald before saying, "...You know, the woman we saved before had a similar hairpin on! However, I'm pretty sure she only had one on, which is why I'm assuming this pin is hers! No wonder the hairpin felt so familiar when you first took it out of the letter!"

"What? Are you absolutely sure?" asked Gerald.

"Positive!" replied Rey.

"Then what are we waiting for? Let's head to the hospital!" declared Gerald as he and Rey bolted out of the office again, driving straight for the hospital...

While driving, Gerald—who now understood that the incident had been too straightforward for it to be over—was prompted to say, "The incident is far from over... Freeing that girl from the ATM was only the first step! With that in mind, we haven't moved past the crisis regarding the second hostage!"

Forget the third hostage, they weren't even done saving the second one yet! Regardless, now that Gerald was sure that the incident wasn't over yet, he knew that he had to protect the second hostage at all costs.

"I see... How abominable our opponent is...! To think that he'd fool us like this!" grumbled Rey.

Either way, the duo soon arrived at the hospital...

After quickly inquiring about the woman, they realized that she had left the hospital not too long ago!

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Hearing that, Gerald and Rey dashed out of the hospital, hoping to catch up with the woman. As they rushed out, the duo thankfully stopped just in time to avoid getting run over by a speeding black car!

“Where the hell did you learn to drive, b*stard?!” scowled Rey as he glared while pointing at the black car.

Gerald, on the other hand, was much more interested in the purple letter that had fluttered out of the car and was now lying on the ground.

Quickly opening it, Gerald then read the letter...

‘The second game has officially begun!’

“That utter b*stard...!” growled Gerald as he crumpled the letter up, knowing full well that he had been a step too late.

Since the envelope had come from that black car, the car was undoubtedly the key!

Still, now wasn’t the time to feel sorry for himself. With that, Gerald began running toward their car while shouting, “Hurry, Rey! We have to pursue them!”

Once both of them were inside, Gerald stepped on the accelerator, sending the car lunging forward! Since the black car was long gone, Gerald could only speed in the direction he had last seen the black car in.

Unfortunately, even though Gerald accelerated all the way, soon enough, he understood that he had lost the black car for good...

Thinking the same thing, Rey was prompted to ask, "...What should we do now, Mr. Crawford...?"

Neither of them even knew how to proceed since the culprit was always one step ahead of them...

As Gerald wondered how to even reply to Rey, his phone suddenly began ringing.

Immediately knowing who the caller was, the angered Gerald picked it up and roared, "You b*stard! What the hell do you want? Are you fooling around with me?!"

Laughing maniacally, the caller then mocked, "Not so calm anymore, eh, Mr. Crawford? It's not your style to be this manic!"

"...Don't get too smug just yet! I'll definitely capture you...!" sneered Gerald.

"Hah! Be my guest! If you can, that is! Regardless, let's meet at the Moon Observation Deck at seven tonight! If you don't come, well... this woman isn't going to be alive for much longer!" scoffed the man before hanging up the phone.

The Moon Observation Deck was a viewing platform in the Leicom Continent that was only open at night. From up there, one could see the entire continent...

Regardless, since the perpetrator had made an appointment there, Gerald was sure that something was definitely going to happen at the observation deck. Even so, what choice did he have but to obey the scoundrel's orders...

With that, Gerald and Rey then drove to the Moon Observation Deck... While it was still noon by the time they arrived, their wait in the car didn't feel long at all.

Soon enough, the clock struck seven and the Moon Observation Deck became open to the public. With that in mind, it barely took a few minutes for the entire place to be packed with people. Everyone had come over to enjoy the night view from the famed observation deck...

Well, everyone except for Gerald and Rey. They were here to save someone.

Either way, now that the observation deck was finally open, the duo got out of their car and immediately began looking for that woman... To their dismay, no matter how much they looked, they simply couldn't find any traces of her!

"...Could that b*stard be playing around with us again...?" speculated Rey with a slight frown on his face.

Upon hearing that, Gerald gave no response. However, it was shortly after when Gerald noticed the presence of a rather odd spot.

Pausing for a moment, Gerald then said, "...Come with me. I think I have a lead!"

With that, Rey began running after Gerald who was already bolting toward that place...

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Chapter 1796

Soon enough, the duo arrived at what appeared to be a suspended platform.

Looking up and pointing toward it, Gerald then shouted, "Up there!"

As Rey turned to look up, he was surprised to see the hair of a woman hanging from the side of the platform!

It didn't take a genius to figure out that the woman lying up there was none other than the bank staff member they had previously saved from the ATM machine! To be captured again immediately after being released from the hospital... What an unfortunate woman...

At that moment, both of them noticed that a figure had been staring intently at them from some rockery formations nearby.

Seeing that, Gerald ordered, "...Go save that woman, Rey. I'm hunting that person down!"

Following that, Gerald bolted straight for the figure, believing that he was definitely the culprit behind all this!

As he swiftly gained on the now fleeing man, the frustrated Gerald couldn't help but yell, "Stop running, you coward!"

To Gerald's surprise, the man did as Gerald told.

After his abrupt halt, the man then slowly turned around to look at Gerald—who had stopped in his tracks as well—before saying in a sinister voice, "So, we finally meet, Mr. Crawford!"

"...Who the hell are you..." growled Gerald as he glared daggers at the man.

"Hah! I'm just someone who's about to die!" replied the man as he slowly slid his hood off to reveal his face...

Only for the now stunned Gerald to realize that the person was faceless!

Blank, smooth, and white, the expressionless person would've terrified any ordinary person to the point of fainting! Thankfully, Gerald was no ordinary person.

"You... You're not human, are you!" yelled Gerald as he stared at the faceless man.

"That I'm not! Though the same applies to you too, no? Still, unlike you who's only half ghost, I'm an actual dead person who died drowning!" sneered the strange man.

"...Alright, so... Why did you come looking for me then...?" asked Gerald who was now more confused than anything.

"Listen up! My name is Yorrek Gurland and I drowned in a river three years ago! The one who drowned me was none other than the chairman of the Ember Lord Group, the Ember Lord himself! Regardless, after finding out that you had killed the Ember Lord, I just couldn't come to terms with it, which is why I came looking for you!" declared Yorrek.

Now understanding that this person had come looking for him for killing the Ember Lord, Gerald then replied, "...Couldn't come to terms? I'm not sure what your thought process is, but shouldn't you be thanking me now? After all, I've technically avenged you by killing him!"

"Silence! He should have died by my hands! You ruined everything!" roared Yorrek almost hysterically.

Hearing that, Gerald could immediately tell how deep his hatred was toward the Ember Lord. To think that Yorrek would be so reluctant to let him go, even after the Ember Lord's death...

"...Well, whatever the case is, he's already dead! What else do you want?" asked Gerald.

"Heh! While he's dead, you're still alive! Since you're the one who killed him, I'm holding you responsible for all this! With that said, I'm killing you as his substitute!" retorted Yorrek in a frigid tone.

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"...Oh? Do you really think you're capable of getting rid of me?" retorted Gerald as he looked at Yorrek with a disdainful expression.

Forget getting rid of him, Yorrek was probably incapable of even harming him!

“While it’s true that I can’t personally kill you, I can still get rid of others!” sneered Yorrek before immediately dashing toward Gerald!

Seeing that, Gerald quickly drew the Astrabyss Sword, ready to slash Yorrek when he came within range!

However, in the very next second, Yorrek seemed to just disappear into thin air! Despite Gerald having his sword at the ready, Yorrek appeared to have successfully escaped...

While it was certainly disappointing, Gerald was sure that the game between him and Yorrek wasn’t over yet. In fact, this meeting probably symbolized the true start of the games...

Fast forward to sometime later, Rey—who appeared quite flustered—couldn’t help but look at Gerald, his tone brimming with admiration as he said, “You’re... really amazing, you know that, Mr. Crawford?”

“Am I?” replied Gerald in a humble tone.

To explain what led to this exchange of words, let’s go back to when Gerald first regrouped with Rey at the car park. By that point, Rey had already saved the woman and he was simply waiting for Gerald to return.

When he finally saw Gerald, he was about to call out when all of a sudden, Gerald disappeared! The next thing Rey knew, a gust of wind had rushed past him, and a second later, all of Tyson’s men—who had been lying in ambush—could be seen lying on the ground, defeated. Gerald was the only one who remained standing in the middle...

Naturally, that had stunned Rey greatly, and he became surer than ever that Gerald was actually some kind of mythical being... Thinking back, it truly was a wise decision to remain by Gerald's side.

Gerald himself found those men to be trivial affairs. After all, it barely took seconds for him to defeat all of them.

While his past self would've surely been afraid in that situation—due to his lack of ability back then—, his present self was different. He was no longer afraid of going against people like Tyson or anyone possessing that level of strength.

"Of course, you are! You were able to beat those ten men like they were nothing! What more, you were so fast that I wasn't even able to witness you defeating all of them!"

"Barely praiseworthy. They were just too weak! Speaking of which, call it a gut feeling, but it seemed like those men were just trying to steal something from you. Am I correct? And if so, what were they trying to obtain?" replied Gerald rather curiously.

"...That..." muttered Rey, sounding slightly hesitant to reply.

Seeing Rey's hesitation, Gerald then said, "...If it's inconvenient to share, just forget about it. I won't force you!"

The fact that Rey was being so wary about sharing the information must have meant that the item was extremely extraordinary and special to him...

"...Rather than it being inconvenient to me, I'm just worried that it'll bring trouble to you! For context,

this item I have... It's unique, to say the least..." replied Rey.

Rey wasn't lying when he said that either. After all, if he ended up bring unnecessary trouble to Gerald's doorstep, he would surely end up being filled with self-reproach...

Even so, Rey's warning only made Gerald even more curious than before.

"...Now I'm really curious. Just tell me what it is already. Don't worry, I'm stronger than you could ever imagine. Who knows, I could even help you solve what's been troubling you! Besides, I'd rather not have you bear such a great risk alone!" said Gerald.

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Seeing that Gerald had hit the brakes, Rey took the chance to take a wooden box out from his backpack. The box itself had a painting resembling a spider on the lid...

Following that, Rey slowly opened the wooden box... Revealing a single black bead.

"The item they were after... is this bead!" said Rey as he handed the box to Gerald.

Taking the box, Gerald then stared at the black bead... and barely a second later, the bead momentarily glowed red!

Seeing that, both of them exchanged glances with each other. It appeared that both of them had witnessed the same thing.

“...Where on earth did you even get this thing?” asked Gerald after a short pause.

“Well, remember when we went for a trip to the countryside? I found it by a small river and simply felt compelled to pick it up... Later on, Tyson and the others realized that I had the box, and they instantly wanted me to hand it to them though I refused...” replied Rey.

“I see... Have any strange incidents happened to you after you took the box?” asked Gerald.

Hearing that, Rey took a moment to think about it.

After quite a while, Rey eventually said, “...Come to think of it, there is one incident... Back then, I was just returning home when the bead suddenly began emitting a red, dazzling glow... Truth be told, I was sure that it was going to explode back then! However, the glow simply dimmed after that, and the bead hasn't behaved strangely ever since...”

“...A red glow... You mean the one we just witnessed?”

“Bingo. Regardless, do you have any idea what this black bead even is, Mr. Crawford...?” asked Rey as he looked at Gerald.

In response, Gerald simply shook his head. While he hadn't the slightest clue what the bead was used for, he did know that it was brimming with the aura of an evil spirit. With that in mind, the bead was definitely bad news.

With that in mind, after looking at the bead for a while longer, Gerald then closed the wooden box

before returning it to Rey.

“Hold onto this first, Rey. Once we get back to the office, I’ll have someone look at it. With any luck, we’ll be able to find out more about its history!” said Gerald in a reassuring tone.

Nodding in response, Rey then replied, “Loud and clear, Mr. Crawford!”

After making sure that the box was safely returned into Rey’s backpack, Gerald then started the car’s engine again before driving straight for the office...

Upon returning, the duo saw that Juno had already prepared everything for the trip.

“I’ve packed all the equipment we’ll be needing, Gerald! We’re all set to go!” reported Juno.

“Excellent. We’ll be heading off at dawn then!” declaring Gerald as he turned to face both Juno and Rey.

“...Well, if you insist...” replied Rey, sensing how sincere Gerald’s concern was toward him.

With that, a brief screeching of tires could be heard...

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“Copy that!” replied both of them.

Since they were going into the adventure mostly blind, all three of them had no idea what troubles to even expect. With that in mind, all they could do was prepare different tactics and equipment in hopes

that it would allow them to be ready enough to deal with the situations they eventually came across.

Still, with Gerald there, Juno and Rey undoubtedly felt much more assured. After all, the duo knew that Gerald would never let anything happen to them.

Regardless, all three of them turned in early that night. After all, they were embarking on a new adventure the next day, so they needed to be well-rested and be in good shape.

At eight the next morning, the trio took one more look at Gerald's map—that Old Flint had given them—before getting into their car and driving for Sunset Village...

From their starting point, it would take approximately two days before they would arrive there. With that in mind, they would have to spend two whole days on the road..

While Gerald speedily drove along the highway, Juno—who was seated at the shotgun seat—passed the time by reading a book entitled, 'Yin and Yang Theory', that she had borrowed from Rey's house.

It was a while later when Juno closed the book for a moment... And it was also then when she realized something.

"...Say, the book doesn't specify who the author is!" muttered Juno.

"Yeah, I realized that too. I wonder if they just forgot to add the author's name in while publishing it..." replied Rey who had evidently realized that much earlier on, though he didn't particularly find it noteworthy.

"Forgot? Such books have to undergo strict examination! Without the author's name, the book couldn't

have been published in the first place! At least not legally!” replied Juno.

“Well, there’s also the case of the book’s author being a special person. With that in mind, the author could’ve easily bypassed the need of having their name written on the cover to be published!” said Gerald, putting his two cents in.

“...When you put it that way, it does make quite a bit of sense!” replied Juno in agreement.

“Still... If the author truly is that special, then doesn’t that make the book very special as well? Why would they still choose to publish it then?” said Rey in a confused tone.

“A valid question. Still, a published book with a mysterious author... I wonder if the book holds any secrets in it...” muttered Juno.

“...Speaking of which, did the book mention anything about the token of Demonic Blood? From the Demonic Blood Clan?” asked Gerald.

Hearing that, Juno began flipping through the pages... and after a while, she realized that there were mentions of the token!

“There are... Apparently, the token of Demonic Blood is a divine artifact of the Demonic Blood Clan. It can be used to rule all ghosts and spirits!” replied Juno.

Upon hearing that, Gerald nodded slightly. As it turned out, what Old Flint had told him was true.

“...Say... Are we heading to Sunset Village for the token of Demonic Blood...?” asked Rey who appeared to have caught onto something.

Juno turned to look at Gerald as well when she heard that.

“We are, actually. We’re going to the most feminine place to look for the Demonic Blood Clan’s territory. With any luck, we’ll finally be able to obtain the token of Demonic Blood!” replied Gerald without the slightest hesitation.

Since all three of them were in this together, Gerald found little reason to hide such crucial information.

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Chapter 1800

“...I see... Even so, it won’t be easy to get that token... After all, the book also states that many others have attempted to obtain the token of Demonic Blood. In the end, not only did all of them fail, but they all had to pay heavy prices as well...” replied Juno.

“I’m aware. Still, I believe that we’ll ultimately be able to obtain the token!” declared Gerald confidently.

After all, though the others failed to get the token, Gerald didn’t necessarily have to fail as well. Gerald was sure that with how times had changed, the capabilities of his generation should be much harder for the Demonic Blood Clan to deal with. What more, with how powerful he currently was, he truly believed that he had the right to obtain the token of Demonic Blood...

Regardless, after driving for two days, the trio finally arrived at Sunset Village...

Upon arriving, Gerald told Juno to look for a hotel for them to stay the night. They would continue the second stage of their journey the next day...

Following his orders, Juno quickly found a high-end hotel for them to stay in.

After getting their luggage to their rooms, the trio then headed to the restaurant downstairs to have their dinner.

The second they stepped into the restaurant, however, Rey suddenly frowned as he held onto his belly. Looking at Gerald and Juno, he then said, "...I... may need to head to the washroom for a bit. You two go on ahead, and order whatever you're ordering for me. I'm not a picky eater, so don't worry!"

Following that, the duo watched as Rey hastily dashed for the bathroom.

Choosing not to think much of it, Gerald and Juno then found a dining table for three and began ordering...

It was about ten minutes later when Rey finally returned. However, he appeared noticeably nervous as he quickly walked over to Gerald's table.

Raising a slight brow, Gerald was prompted to ask, "...Is... something the matter? Why do you look so nervous?"

"...W-well... You see, when I was in the bathroom earlier..." stuttered Rey who was sounding rather out of breath.

“Hold up. Drink some water and calm down first...” said Juno as she passed a glass of water to the anxious lad.

Nodding, Rey then took a sip of water before taking in a deep breath. Once he was calmer, Rey then lowered his head before whispering, “...Alright, so... While I was at the washroom earlier, I overheard a conversation between two men... From what I’ve managed to gather, they’re here for the Demonic Blood Clan, just like us!”

Hearing that, both Gerald and Juno immediately began looking around to see if anyone overheard that. Once they were sure that nobody was close to them, they turned back to face Rey.

“...Are you absolutely sure you didn’t hear wrongly, Rey?” asked Gerald with a serious tone.

“One hundred percent!” replied Rey with a determined nod.

Based on how sure he looked and sounded, the duo definitely didn’t have any further doubts. As it turned out, the trio wasn’t the only ones looking for the Demonic Blood Clan...

“...Do you remember what the duo looked like?” asked Gerald after a brief pause.

Upon hearing that question, Rey immediately began looking around... until finally, he found the two people he had eavesdropped on back in the bathroom.

Subtly pointing toward the men—who were seated quite close to them—, Rey then whispered, “That’s them!”

Turning to look at where Rey was pointing, Gerald saw four black-robed men sitting around a dining table. Even from afar, he could already tell that these weren't good people...

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Chapter 1801

"...Both of you, stay here. I'm heading there to have a look!" instructed Gerald as he got up and took his empty glass before walking in the direction where the four men were sitting.

Since the customers had to refill their own drinks in this restaurant, it was perfectly normal for Gerald to get more water for himself. On his return trip, however, he made sure to 'accidentally' drop his glass right next to the four men's table!

Seeing that some of the water had accidentally splashed onto a few of the men's pants, Gerald quickly reached for the glass while 'apologetically' saying, "I-I'm sorry!"

In response, one of the men simply got Gerald's glass for him before handing it back to the youth while saying, "It's fine. Be more careful!"

"I-I will!" replied Gerald as he noticed the tattoo on the man's wrist while taking his glass back.

Following that, he then hurried back to his dining table. The second he sat down, however, his expression instantly turned slightly unpleasant...

Noticing the change in his mood, Juno was prompted to ask, "...What's wrong, Gerald? Did you manage to gather anything...?"

“...Well, for one, those aren’t ordinary people... They belong to the Soul Hunter organization!” whispered Gerald.

“The Soul Hunters? That’s them? To think they’d be here as well!” replied the shocked Juno in a hushed voice.

Raising a slight brow, Rey then asked, “...Um... Who exactly are the Soul Hunters...?”

As the name suggested, the Soul Hunters were an organization that specialized in hunting and killing ghosts and spirits. Naturally, they also possessed special equipment that would help them detect the presence of what they hunted.

Regardless, Gerald ignored Rey’s question before saying, “...Since they’re looking for the Demonic Blood Clan’s territory, they’re definitely after the token of Demonic Blood as well...”

If that group managed to get their hands on the token, then the consequences would be near unimaginable... After all, they would be able to rule over every ghost and spirit on the planet! Things would surely go out of hand by then! With that in mind, there was no way Gerald was going to let them have their way.

“Figured as much... Still, what are we going to do now? Are we getting rid of them?” asked Juno.

Shaking his head, Gerald then replied, “Negative. While it’s true that there are only four of them, if I attack them now, I fear that the entire Soul Hunter organization will come after us to have their revenge. That wouldn’t be beneficial at all. With that in mind, I propose that we spy on them first.”

Hearing that, Juno could only agree.

With that, the trio then returned to their rooms to rest after their meal.

Well, Juno and Rey did. Gerald himself simply couldn't allow himself to remain idle. With that, he began meditating... and soon enough, he was able to have an out-of-body experience. With his mind now free to explore, Gerald—who was now invisible to the naked eye—immediately began searching for the four Soul Hunters again.

It didn't take long for him to find them, but by that point, all four of them were already sneakily leaving the hotel despite how late it was.

Watching as they entered the darkness, Gerald knew that he had to tail them.

A few minutes later, the group of Soul Hunters found themselves approaching a forest... And standing before that forest, was a mysterious-looking cloaked figure who had his back against them... It was evident that he was waiting there for them...

Seeing him, the four Soul Hunters then hurriedly stood at attention—behind the man—before respectfully declaring, “Leader!”

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Chapter 1802

June 9, 2021 by itgoes

Gerald Crawford: The Secretly or invisible Rich Man Chapter 1802

Perfectly hidden, Gerald—who had been secretly monitoring all this—found himself slightly surprised.

To think that the cloaked man was actually the leader of the Soul Hunter organization... Since their leader was also present, it only made sense that this was a large-scale mission. In other words, there was possibly going to be more Soul Hunters around...

Gerald's train of thought was cut short when the cloaked man asked his subordinates in a frigid tone, "I trust nobody knows your true identities yet?"

"Worry not, leader, for we've concealed our identities well!" replied one of the Soul Hunters.

"You'd better have. Regardless, head for the phosphorite mountain area at dawn. I'll be heading there first tonight. Again, don't get found out!" instructed the cloaked man.

"Loud and clear, leader!" replied all four of the Soul Hunters in unison.

With their reply, the cloaked man then leaped into the air, promptly disappearing into the dark of night...

After watching all that, Gerald couldn't help but feel slightly stunned. Just as he had speculated, the Soul Hunters were here for the token of Demonic Blood. The fact that he could tell how strong the leader of the Soul Hunter organization was certainly didn't make him feel any better...

Regardless, since his party was also planning to head out at dawn, there was a high chance that they were going to bump into the Soul Hunters while heading to the phosphorite mountain area...

Under normal circumstances, even if they did meet, both parties would've just ignored each other. After

all, the fact that the cultivators and the Soul Hunters had completely different backgrounds meant that there was little reason for the two groups to meddle with each other.

Unfortunately, since both of them wanted the same thing, conflict was pretty much inevitable.

With that in mind, after thinking about it, Gerald decided that it would be best to take out the four Soul Hunters before they even got to the phosphorite mountain area. By doing so, he would at least ensure that the three of them would have fewer enemies to deal with once they were at the actual location.

His mind made up, Gerald watched as the four Soul Hunters began to leave... and once they were close enough, Gerald made himself visible as he punched the air, forming a shockwave that sent all four of the Soul Hunters flying backward!

Of course, the attack wasn't lethal, and when they realized what had assaulted them, the four men instantly shouted, "A ghost?!"

All of them recognized Gerald as a ghost due to his body's current state.

Either way, it was clear that none of them had anticipated to bump into a ghost here of all places. Even so, they were trained professionals.

With that, all four of them quickly regained their wits as one of the Soul Hunters angrily shouted, "Quick! Gang up on him!"

Taking their daggers out in response, the four individuals then began charging toward Gerald! Since these people actually hunted down and killed ghosts and spirits, they were naturally much stronger compared to ordinary people.

Even so, in the end, they were nowhere near as strong or fast as Gerald, and Gerald knew it. With that in mind, Gerald wasn't about to get intimidated by their group attack anytime soon.

Instead, he simply chose to easily dodge their attacks!

Before the Soul Hunters could launch their second round of attacks, Gerald swiftly grabbed one of the men by his throat!

Unable to react in time, the other three Soul Hunters could only stare wide-eyed as the sickening sound of bones cracking could be heard... And just like that, one of them died from a broken neck!

Gerald himself simply tossed the body aside as casually as it was rubbish.

As for the hunters, they were simply too stupefied to feel humiliated. After all, none of them could've imagined that Gerald would be this powerful...

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“...What power... What kind of monster even are you?! Regardless, we bear no grudges against you! What reason do you have to kill us?!” interrogated one of the Soul Hunters.

After all, he was right. Gerald had simply attacked them out of the blue! It certainly raised quite a few questions.

“Hah! I don’t need to explain anything!” retorted Gerald, finding it laughable that they even considered the possibility of him telling them his motive or his identity. That was simply impossible!

With that in mind, Gerald then made his move... and in the blink of an eye, the three remaining Soul Hunters found themselves dead as well. To think that they weren’t even able to find out who Gerald really was before death...

Regardless, now that all four of them were dead, Gerald began searching their bodies... and eventually, he found four Soul Hunter tokens.

As the name suggested, these tokens represented their status as Soul Hunters, and anyone who was accepted into the organization would receive one. Either way, after obtaining the tokens, Gerald kept them by his side before swiftly leaving the scene...

As for the four corpses, while someone would probably discover them the following morning, Gerald wasn’t too worried about being a suspect. After all, he had attacked them in his Avatar form, which meant that he wouldn’t have left behind any traces of physical evidence no matter what he did.

Whatever the case was, now that he had the four tokens, Gerald felt that he and his party would be able to enter the phosphorite mountain area a lot more smoothly. At the very least, the trio wouldn’t be targeted too quickly by any other Soul Hunters they bumped into.

While this was slightly underhanded, all was fair in love and war. As long as he was able to obtain the token of Demonic Blood, Gerald didn't mind doing all this.

Regardless, Gerald quickly made his way back into his physical body—back at the hotel—before promptly falling asleep...

The next morning, all three of them awoke pretty early and after checking out, they instantly headed for their car. Once they were inside, Juno and Rey raised their heads as they heard Gerald say, "Here, take these!"

Raising a brow, both of them then extended their hands out... only for Gerald to hand a Soul Hunter token to each of them.

"...What's this then?" asked Rey in a curious tone.

"...Soul Hunter tokens? But how? And why would you have these?" exclaimed Juno in surprise as she turned to look at Gerald. Though she asked that question, she had a hunch as to why he had these.

"I bumped into the four Soul Hunters the night before and after dealing with them, I took their Soul Hunter tokens! With them, it'll be much more convenient for us to enter the phosphorite mountain area since we won't easily be found out by the other Soul Hunters. With any luck, we'll be able to keep our identities concealed throughout the process!" explained Gerald.

Hearing that, Juno and Rey realized that Gerald had secretly taken out the competition the night before. What swift action!

"By, 'won't be easily found out', do you mean to say that we should pretend to be Soul Hunters since we now have their tokens?" asked Rey for confirmation.

“Bingo. If all goes well, we should be able to achieve our goals right under the noses of the other Soul Hunters!” replied Gerald with a smile.

Following that, Gerald stepped on the gas and immediately began heading toward the phosphorite mountain area...

The phosphorite mountain area was quite famous in Sunset Village.

With how much phosphorite there was in the area, the locals would sell them to manufacturers who would then use the raw materials to manufacture other chemical substances. Aside from that, the phosphorite would also be sold for decorative purposes.

In short, the locals would rely on that place to obtain riches.

Whatever the case was, it was a two-hour drive from Sunset Village to their destination, and by the time they finally arrived there, it was twelve.

Seeing that they were just in time for lunch, Gerald then parked his car at a parking lot before leading Rey and Juno to a restaurant...

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Chapter 1804

After ordering their food, Rey couldn't help but whisper, "Did you two see all that phosphorite out there? What ungodly amounts!"

"Naturally. From what I've heard, the locals sell them to gain extra income. Another interesting fact that I came across is that the phosphorite is supposedly unlimited. Once an area is completely excavated, more phosphorite will simply reappear after some time! It truly is magical," explained Gerald.

"It truly is! Still, if that really is the case, then we could undoubtedly become rich just by relying on the endless phosphorite!" muttered Rey.

Hearing that, Gerald and Juno could only shake their heads. As it turned out, Rey was simply thinking more about the money.

"Allow me to remind you that you're an outsider, Rey. If you even dare touch the phosphorite, you'll surely be beaten up by the locals in no time!" replied Gerald.

Since the locals were the rightful owner of the phosphorite and they used it to gain riches, there was no

way in hell that they were going to let some random nobody take that away from them for free!

“I’m just saying!” said Rey as he chuckled in response before remaining silent.

Gerald himself didn’t care much about the money. After all, he was a person who had near endless wealth, so money wasn’t really an issue for him. Besides, it wasn’t as though they were here for money in the first place. Their goal was to obtain the token of Demonic Blood.

Regardless, it wasn’t long after before a group of men donning black clothes entered the restaurant they were in... and upon realizing their presence, the trio instantly put their guard up. After all, all the men who had just entered had tattoos reminiscent of the Soul Hunters on their arms!

“...Judging from those tattoos... They’re Soul Hunters, right, Mr. Crawford...?” whispered Rey.

Nodding in response, Gerald then said, “Indeed. I must say, their tattoos are a dead giveaway for people trying to lay low...”

Whatever the case was, to think that they would bump into other Soul Hunters here of all places. How unfortunate!

“Regardless, stay calm. Don’t let them find you suspicious!” added Gerald.

Hearing that, Rey and Juno quickly nodded. Rey even made sure to lower his head, afraid that he would mess up and make them look over.

Either way, the food soon came and the three of them quickly began chowing down.

However, it wasn't long before all three of them realized that the Soul Hunters were staring in their direction. What more, they appeared to be discussing something as well...

Seeing that, the anxious Rey quickly began quivering in worry as he whispered, "T-they've been looking at us this entire time, Mr. Crawford...! Have we been discovered? What should we do...?!"

"Again, stay calm!" replied Gerald as he glared at Rey, knowing full well that panicking would only make the Soul Hunters feel even more suspicious of them.

To the party's dismay, they soon watched as one of the Soul Hunters got up and began walking over to their table...

Stopping right by Juno's side, the Soul Hunter completely ignored both Gerald and Rey as he looked at her while asking, "Well hello there, beauty! What are you here for?"

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"We're just here for some minor business, mister!" replied Gerald with a subtle smile as he stood up the second he saw Juno signaling for him to help.

In response, the Soul Hunter simply looked at Gerald with a bleak expression before arrogantly retorting, "And who the hell are you? Can't you see that I'm talking to her? Do you think any of this concerns you?"

Upon hearing that, Gerald instantly frowned... and the next thing the Soul Hunter knew, he was already flying backward from Gerald's force palm attack!

Seeing that, the other Soul Hunters immediately got up, unsheathing their daggers at the same time as they glared at Gerald.

None of them had expected Gerald to make the first move. Naturally, they hadn't anticipated him to be this strong either.

"Those aren't ordinary people! They definitely have a reason for being here! Get them!" declared one of the Soul Hunters.

Hearing that, the other Soul Hunters instantly bolted toward Gerald and his party!

Even so, Gerald wasn't worried at all. With another force palm, Gerald sent a wave of energy toward the assailants, causing all of them to fall to the ground!

Now that there was room to escape, Gerald immediately grabbed onto Rey and Juno's arms before yelling, "Run!"

With that, the trio dashed out of the restaurant, unable to even find the time to pay for their meal!

By the time the Soul Hunters got back to their feet and ran out of the restaurant, Gerald and his party were nowhere in sight... They had successfully driven away!

“Those b*stards! They really are extraordinary! Hurry and report this to the leader!” yelled the leader of the group.

So much for a stealthy approach... Gerald and his party had been found out before the adventure even began!

Whatever the case was, Rey—who had been frightened half to death earlier—was finally able to catch his breath after panting for so long. He truly hadn't expected Gerald to just fight the other party right off the bat...

Still, now that he had regained his calmness, Rey turned to face Gerald before admiringly saying, “You really are something else, Mr. Crawford! Sending so many of them flying in a single attack... It was just like watching an action movie scene!”

“While I appreciate the compliment, could you please be a bit calmer in the future...” grumbled Gerald as he raised a slight eyebrow while looking at Rey.

Upon hearing that, the embarrassed and awkward Rey simply lowered his head, mumbling in agreement.

Regardless, Juno herself didn't really blame Rey. With that in mind, she tried to switch the topic by asking, “...Either way, what should we do now, Gerald? The Soul Hunters are definitely going to go after us now!”

With the mess they had just created, the alerted enemies would definitely start causing them trouble in the near future...

“Don’t worry, they still don’t have a good grasp on our identities for now! As long as we remain in the shadows while they’re doing things in public, I believe we can turn this situation into an advantageous one!” replied Gerald in a calm tone.

Gerald believed that the leader of the Soul Hunters wouldn’t waste too much effort on three nobodies. After all, their main target was still the token of Demonic Blood...

Not too long after, the cloaked man—whom Gerald had met the day before—could be seen sitting in his tent at a campsite.

A few Soul Hunters were now standing before him—after getting his permission to enter—as one of them reported, “We bumped into three peculiar individuals in a restaurant today, leader! We know that at least one of them has extraordinary strength, and we believe that the trio aren’t regular people!”

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Upon hearing that, the cloaked man stood up as well before asking, “What do we know about them?”

The same Soul Hunter from before then replied, “Not much, though we assume that they’re here for the token of Demonic Blood as well!”

“I see... Well, pay more attention to them from now on. If you discover the trio, then report back immediately! If they attempt to get in our way, just get rid of them!” ordered the cloaked man.

“Loud and clear, leader!” yelled the soul hunters in unison before leaving the tent...

Fast forward to nighttime, Gerald and his party could be seen setting up their tents after finding flat ground. Once that was done, they started a fire and sat around it.

After a short while, Rey couldn't help but look at Gerald as he asked, "...Is... there a reason we're camping out here...? Why didn't we just book a hotel room...?"

Turning to face Rey, Gerald then replied, "The Soul Hunters are tracking us down now, remember? Staying in a hotel would only turn us into sitting ducks!"

Hearing that, Rey quickly registered Gerald's logic. After all, if everyone from the Soul Hunter organization was here, then staying in a hotel would definitely increase their risk of being found. That, of course, would place them in an extremely dangerous situation...

Either way, a brief moment later, Rey stood up before saying, "I... uh... need to use the washroom!"

Following that, Rey then began jogging toward some bushes. Since they were in the wilderness, there really was no other way for them to relieve themselves...

Seeing that Rey was gone, Juno was prompted to say, "We'll definitely be facing a bloody battle with the Soul Hunter organization if we're found again, Gerald..."

Gerald naturally already knew that, so he simply nodded before replying, "I know. However, we don't really have much of a choice. After all, if the Soul Hunters obtain the token, then everything will surely go haywire!"

After all, the token of Demonic Blood could be used to control all the ghosts in the world. With that in mind, if the Soul Hunters got their hands on it, then the ghosts would surely be used to conquer all of humanity! By that point, everyone would surely be done for!

Shaking his head as he thought about it, Gerald then tried to change the topic by asking, “Speaking of which... You’re currently at the Sage Realm now, right?”

Nodding slightly in response, Juno then sighed before replying, “I am, though I’m already at the peak stage of that realm. Unfortunately, I’ve been unable to make a breakthrough!”

Raising one’s strength to the next realm was never easy, and Juno simply didn’t have the talent that Gerald had. With that in mind, all she could do was continue to train in hopes that she would be able to break through into the next realm. Sadly for her, she had already been training tirelessly for a few months by now, and the fact that she still hadn’t made any progress was certainly disheartening.

“Don’t worry, I’ll definitely think of a way to help you breakthrough!” said Gerald as he smiled faintly while consoling her.

Hearing that, Juno then nodded, placing her full belief in Gerald. He was definitely going to help her improve in the long run!

It was at that moment when both of them suddenly heard Rey shouting!

Instantly turning vigilant, both of them got up before running toward Rey’s direction!

“What’s wrong?” asked Gerald as he cautiously scanned the area while running.

To their shock, Rey—who hadn’t even put his pants on properly yet—was trembling vigorously on the ground!

Looking around to see if anything had attacked him, Gerald and Juno soon found it odd that they couldn't find anything out of the ordinary...

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Their attention was brought back to Rey when they heard his quivering voice say, "I-it was so terrifying, Mr. Crawford...!"

Looking at Rey's fearful expression, Gerald then frowned slightly as he asked, "What is? What did you see?"

"Yeah, I mean, there doesn't seem to be anything around..." muttered Juno who was feeling just as bewildered as Gerald was.

Still, both of them were sure that whatever had scared Rey wasn't a ghost. After all, the duo couldn't sense the presence of ghosts at all.

"I-I'm not too sure either... But just as I got up after doing my business, I suddenly felt a cool breeze blow past me... But... then..." muttered Rey who was now shaking so much that he couldn't even finish his sentence.

"...Then what?" asked Gerald.

"...W-well... When I turned around and looked up... I saw a pair of bloodshot eyes staring right back at me...! I-It was so terrifying...!" stuttered Rey as he recalled the incident he had witnessed.

Upon hearing that, the duo instinctively looked up... but even after scanning around again, neither of them was able to see anything that Rey had just described. All there was up there was the crescent moon...

"...You sure it wasn't a trick of your eyes? I don't think either of us see anything like that..." asked Gerald as he looked at Rey with a slightly raised brow.

Shaking his head, Rey then determinedly replied, "I swear on my life, Mr. Crawford and Miss Zorn! I'm not joking around here! There really were a pair of bloodshot eyes!"

Seeing how sure he appeared, Gerald and Juno knew that he wasn't playing around. Adding that to the fact that Rey was trembling so much, he must have really bumped into something exceedingly terrifying...

"...Got it. Regardless, don't worry, I'm here now. Nothing will happen to you! That aside... Pull up your pants already!" said Gerald as he firmly patted Rey's shoulder.

After hearing that statement, Rey looked down... before turning to look at Gerald and Juno again. It took him a second, but when it finally set in that his boxers were in full view this entire time, Rey's face instantly reddened as he quickly pulled his pants up.

Seeing that, Gerald then consoled Rey again by adding, "Alright, let's head back to our tents first. If you need to do your business again later, I'll keep you company!"

Understanding that Rey had undergone a major shock, this was the only way Gerald could think of that could slightly put Rey at ease. Even so, he knew that his words didn't help much since Rey still looked so terrified. The image of the glowing red eyes must have imprinted itself into his mind by this point...

Knowing that staying out here for any longer definitely wouldn't help, Gerald then led Juno and Rey back to their tents....

Once they were there, Gerald got out some warm alcohol and poured a cup for Rey.

"Here! Let's drink that horrible memory away!" said Gerald.

Compared to the much more experienced Gerald, Rey was just a fresh university graduate. Due to that, he barely had any experience with the real world, yet here he was. Out here on an adventure with Gerald. With that in mind, Gerald knew that it was his responsibility to take care of Rey since he was the one who dragged him into this in the first place.

Regardless, Rey took the cup with his still trembling hands before replying, "...Thank you, Mr. Crawford!"

With how frightened Rey still was, Gerald couldn't help but feel slightly worried that the ghost was still lingering around. While he did do a quick scan through the area, it was far too dark by this point to clearly discern anything...

Whatever the case was, after downing the hot alcohol, Rey appeared much more relaxed than before. At the very least, he wasn't trembling anymore.

Looking at Rey, Gerald then asked in a concerned tone, "Feeling better...?"

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Nodding slightly in response, Rey then replied, “Very much so...”

Hearing that, Gerald couldn’t help but breathe a sigh of relief.

However, as Gerald turned to face Rey again—about to say something else—, both he and Juno realized that Rey was staring wide-eyed at something behind them...

It was also at that moment when the duo sensed the presence of another being nearby... Something was definitely amiss...!

“B-behind you two...!” yelled Rey, prompting Gerald and Juno to dodge to the side, making sure to drag Rey to safety as well.

The second they were far enough from their tents, all three of them watched as a black figure leaped high into the air... before landing right atop their campfire and putting it out!

Now engulfed in darkness, the terrified Rey yelled, “T-that’s what I saw earlier! I’m sure of it...!”

As if wanting to prove Rey’s point, a pair of beady bloodshot eyes gleamed in the darkness at that moment... and they were staring right at Gerald and his party!

“What the hell is that creature...?!” asked Juno as she furrowed her brows.

Watching as Rey shook his head, clearly unsure of what it was, Gerald then ordered, “Whatever the case is, disperse! Standing together will only make it easier for it to attack all of us at the same time! Also, get the torchlight in your bag, Juno! I have an idea!”

“Copy that!” replied Juno.

“As for you, Rey! Go find someplace to hide while I deal with this thing!” added Gerald.

Gerald didn’t need to say that twice. After all, Rey wasn’t about to stay anywhere near that terrifying thing! Besides, he knew that he would only get in Gerald’s way if he stayed here.

With that in mind, Rey then nodded vigorously before the trio dispersed!

The bloodshot eyes themselves immediately began bolting in Gerald’s direction!

Realizing that the creature was exceedingly fast and was already quite close to him, Gerald successfully dodged its charge attack before yelling, “Any time now, Juno! Light this place up already!”

“Got it!” shouted Juno as she shone a blinding light in the direction of the bloodshot eyes!

After Juno tossed another torchlight to Gerald—which he easily caught—, Gerald turned his on as well, and with two bright lights shining on the eyes, the trio could finally see what their assailant was...

It was a tusked wild boar! As if its tusks didn’t already look intimidating enough, its entire body was layered with sharp spikes as well!

Staring wide-eyed, none of them had anticipated to bump into such a ferocious beast here!

Regardless, all three of them knew that wild boars were very aggressive, and if one was hungry, it would attack anything it perceived as food... Apparently, they were on its menu!

Either way, all of them snapped out of it the moment the boar began charging toward Juno almost maniacally!

Seeing that, Gerald instantly yelled, "Careful, Juno! Turn the torchlight off!"

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"Stay back and let me deal with it!" added Gerald as he quickly turned to face the boar that was now charging in his direction instead since Juno had switched her torchlight off.

Watching as the sharp-tusked boar opened its mouth wide—clearly aiming to chomp down on Gerald—Gerald knew that a single bite from it could either kill a regular person, or at the very least, maim them.

Naturally, with that in mind, Gerald wasn't about to allow the boar to do that.

Dodge rolling to the side, Gerald then summoned the Astrabyss Sword. Though the sword's main purpose was to deal with ghosts, Gerald believed that it would still hurt as a regular weapon.

Regardless, though the wild boar definitely looked ferocious, its humongous body made it quite slow and inflexible. As a result, it was unable to fully stop after Gerald dodged its attack, and it ended up ramming right into a large tree!

As a sea of leaves fluttered to the ground upon the boar's impact, Gerald knew that it was now or never.

Leaping into the air, Gerald then rapidly began descending, aiming his sword for the boar's back!

"Die!" roared Gerald as he plunged the blade into the boar's back before slicing it open with immense force!

With blood already gushing out from its back, the pained boar let out a massive roar that resonated across the entire forest...! To think that the peace and quiet of night would suddenly be disrupted by such a terrifying cry...

Whatever the case was, when its cry finally died down, the boar flopped to the ground, dead. Since Gerald had only needed to use a single move to finish it, in a way, the boar wasn't all that difficult an enemy to deal with.

Either way, upon realizing that Gerald had killed the wild boar, Rey breathed a sigh of relief, feeling much more relaxed now as he stepped out from behind the tree that he had been hiding behind...

Together with Juno, the duo then walked toward Gerald and stared at the massive boar's corpse...

Feeling that the boar was even larger than he had first imagined, Rey couldn't help but exclaim, "My god! What a massive boar!"

Gerald and Juno had to agree.

“...Well, as they say, good meat shouldn’t be wasted! I guess we now know what’s for dinner! In case you’re worried, wild boar meat is pretty good!” replied Gerald with a smile as he began using the Astrabyss Sword to slice off a large chunk of meat off the wild boar.

As Gerald had said, they hadn’t had their dinner yet, and he was glad that they hadn’t. After all, he—of all people—knew that wild boar meat tasted superb!

Ironically enough, the wild boar was now getting eaten even though it was the one on the hunt for food... While the experience was definitely a frightening one, none of them were complaining since their dinner had essentially come to them.

Regardless, Gerald quickly relit the bonfire before starting to roast the meat over the fire...

Soon enough, a sweet scent began wafting around, causing Rey’s mouth to water as he stared at the roasting meat while saying, “This is going to be my first time tasting wild boar!”

Disregarding Rey’s comment, Gerald paused for a moment before asking in an inquisitive tone, “...Tell me, Rey, do you know what a cultivator is...?”

“...A cultivator...? Is it an item of sorts...?” asked Rey curiously.

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Chapter 1810

Rolling his eyes in response, Gerald then helplessly explained, "It isn't even an object... Look, cultivators are people who deal with and keep ghosts and spirits under control..."

"...Huh? So, like... Ghost hunters or something? Like those on television?" asked Rey.

"More or less. Either way, if you didn't already know, Miss Zorn and I are cultivators!" replied Gerald with a nod.

Since Rey had been with them for a while now, Gerald figured that it would be better if he knew about things like these. What more, Gerald was honestly considering turning Rey into a cultivator as well.

After all, if Rey became a cultivator, then instead of fearing everything, he could instead start dealing with dangers on his own. Gerald, for one, was well aware that he and Juno couldn't remain by his side to protect him his entire life. The thought of it alone was completely unrealistic!

"...H-huh? Both of you are... cultivators...?" asked the now wide-eyed Rey.

Exchanging glances with Juno, Gerald and her then smiled before nodding toward Rey.

"Indeed, we are. Now, my question is... Would you like to become one as well?" asked Gerald.

"...What? I can be one too?" said Rey, excitement in his eyes as he stared at the duo before him. To think that he was being given a chance to be a cultivator! How wonderful!

Rey, for one, had always dreamed of possessing martial arts skills as great as Gerald's. If he successfully

became a cultivator, then no longer would he need to rely on Gerald for protection...

Smiling at Rey's response, Gerald then replied, "Of course you can! Miss Zorn and I can definitely teach you the ropes!"

"I... then, yes! I wish to become a cultivator, Mr. Crawford!" declared the excited Rey.

"Very well, then. From today onward, I'll be your master and I'll teach you the ways of becoming a cultivator!" replied Gerald, officially making Rey his disciple.

"Thank you for taking me under your wing, master!" shouted Rey, immediately changing how he addressed Gerald as he knelt to the ground.

Before Rey could kowtow, however, Gerald quickly pulled him back up while saying, "Look, while I've accepted you to be my disciple, you don't have to do this. I can't stand people kneeling before me out of the blue!"

Hearing that, Rey then grinned sheepishly, realizing that he was behaving like a person from ancient times.

Shaking his head with a chuckle, Gerald then added, "Alright, settle down. Either way, the meat looks cooked enough so let's dig in already!"

Upon hearing that, the trio then began chowing down on their dinner...

"I never thought that wild boar would taste this fresh and delicious! It's arguably even more delicious than ordinary pork!" exclaimed Rey after taking a bite.

True to Rey's words, wild boar was much tastier and had higher quality in general compared to regular pork meat.

"Speaking of which, slice some more meat off the boar later and wrap it up in a bag. We'll be eating boar for the entirety of tomorrow and possibly even the day after!" said Gerald.

Honestly, if they had a way to easily carry the large wild boar around, they'd surely be able to sell it for a lot. Gerald, for one, had certainly considered the idea. Unfortunately, carrying such a huge corpse around was simply too much. With that in mind, the best course of action was to just take a small portion of it for meals.

It wouldn't be a waste either since the carcass would surely be enough to feed many other animals in the forest...

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It was late into the night when the three of them finally decided to return to their tents to sleep.

Due to the wild boar incident, all three of them shared a tent. That way, they could increase the odds of them sensing danger and allow them to assist each other if they were attacked.

Thankfully, all was quiet that night, and the trio woke up early the next morning.

Leaving the tent as soon as he got up, Gerald realized that there were already a number of birds feasting on the wild boar's carcass, with most of them being eagles and vultures. Gerald paid them no notice, and instead began packing up.

It was around nine when all three of them were up and ready to continue on their journey into the depths of the forest...

According to Old Flint's map, walking past the phosphorite mountain area would allow them to accomplish their second step. Of course, that was easier said than done.

After all, not only was the phosphorite mountain extremely vast, but the trio had no idea what kinds of dangers awaited them there as well. With that in mind, they could only hope that they were prepared enough to face whatever obstacles they came across.

Up till this point, they already had to deal with the massive boar and the Soul Hunters... What a dangerous place...

Regardless, it was about two hours later when the trio finally came across a stream. With that, they then decided to replenish their water supply and take a short rest while they were at it.

Now sitting atop a flat stone, Juno found herself asking, "Say... Do you have any idea how much longer we'll need to walk, Gerald...?"

Shaking his head, Gerald then replied, "Not at all... Based on Old Flint's map, all I know is that we'll need to walk past the phosphorite mountain area... Sadly, the map doesn't really specify how huge the area is..."

Just as they were wondering how large the area really was, an arrow suddenly flew past all three of

them!

Immediately turning to face the direction the arrow shot out from, the trio was greeted by the sight of a few men—donning black clothes—with crossbows in hand!

“Soul Hunters!” yelled Gerald as he instantly held onto Juno and Rey’s arms before bolting away with them.

The Soul Hunters themselves instantly began shooting volley after volley of crossbow bolts. It almost felt like it was raining arrows!

Thankfully, the trio managed to take cover in the forest.

“Dmn it! How do we keep bumping into those bstards! How unlucky!” grumbled Rey.

“Please don’t forget that the entire Soul Hunter organization is here. Since they’ve been divided into several small groups, it’s pretty much inevitable that we’ll constantly bump into them while we’re here!” explained Gerald.

Regardless, once they were sure that the Soul Hunters had lost track of them, all three of them couldn’t help but sigh in relief before resuming their journey...

After what had just happened, the trio found that it was safer to simply use the forest path instead of walking by the side of the stream.

Compared to walking in an open area—which would allow them to be easily found and attacked—, traveling within the forest would make them harder to spot. What more, there was also plenty of cover

in the forest, making escape much more plausible there.

Whatever the case was, it was about half an hour later when they finally found a home in the middle of the forest.

“...Say, do you see that, master? To think that people would actually live out here in the middle of nowhere!” exclaimed Rey.

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Gerald and Juno appeared equally as surprised as Rey was. After all, who in the right mind would live this deep in the forest? It truly was mind-boggling.

After a short pause, Gerald then said, “...Well, since there’s someone living here, we may as well ask them if they know how much further we’ll need to walk!”

Nodding in agreement, the duo then began following Gerald’s lead as they walked toward the house...

However, they quickly found themselves retreating into bushes again when they realized that a few Soul Hunters were also walking toward that house!

After knocking on the door, what appeared to be the house’s owner opened it... and before he could even react, the Soul Hunters immediately rushed in!

Following that, horrified screams filled the air!

Hearing all the terror from inside that house, Gerald and the others quickly exchanged glances. The Soul Hunters were definitely there to eliminate that family... How inhumane!

Unable to bear the screams anymore, Juno found herself pleading, "Gerald, let's help them! The Soul Hunters have really gone over the line this time...!"

Upon hearing that, Gerald nodded before turning to face Rey and saying, "Hide here while we resolve the issue, alright, Rey? Don't make a move until we return!"

Of course, Rey wasn't about to go against Gerald's orders, so he quickly hid in some nearby bushes.

Seeing that, Gerald and Juno bolted toward the house! The second they arrived at the now open door, they were immediately greeted by the sight of a murdered couple lying in a puddle of their own blood...

The sight of that instantly infuriated the duo. For the Soul Hunters to do such inhumane acts... They truly were worse than beasts!

"You utter b*stards...!" roared the angered Juno.

At that moment, both of them heard a screaming girl coming from deeper inside the house.

"H-help me...!" screamed the desperate-sounding girl.

Wasting no time, Gerald and Juno then rushed toward the source of the voice...

Realizing that there were a few Soul Hunters standing in their way, Gerald immediately summoned the Astrabyss Sword before expertly slicing all of their necks in one swift slash!

As the Soul Hunters began choking on their own blood, Juno herself continued running toward the source of all the screaming. Soon enough, she entered the room where the terrified screams originated from... And she was greeted by the sight of a Soul Hunter forcefully pinning himself atop a plainly dressed girl!

Now brimming with fury, Juno instantly stabbed the disgusting man's back before yanking him off the girl!

Since Juno was a cultivator, she was way stronger than these puny Soul Hunters. With that in mind, she easily lifted the human trash off the ground... and without the slightest hesitation, she sliced his neck!

Unable to even react, the man died almost instantaneously in Juno's hands...

And just like that, the duo had gotten rid of all the Soul Hunters who had raided the house.

With the issue now resolved, Juno then began walking over to the frightened girl before sitting next to her... As she placed a hand over the poor girl's shoulder, however, the girl instantly began screaming frantically as she instinctively curled up into a ball!

Heartbroken by the girl's state of mind, Juno then slowly embraced her while saying, "It's alright now... You're saved...! It's all going to be alright..."

It took a while, but after Juno's constant reassurance, the girl finally managed to calm down slightly... However, now that the fear was gone, sadness instantly set in, and within Juno's embrace, the girl began shedding tears, her wails resonating across the entire house...

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Chapter 1813

Her cries only made Juno's heart ache even more. Gerald himself could only shake his head as he slowly walked out of the room...

Stepping out, Gerald then signaled for Rey—who was still hiding—to come over.

Seeing that, Rey then quickly made his way toward the house... But the second he saw how bloody it was now inside, he instantly dashed out again to puke his guts out! Since this was the first time he had seen such fresh corpses, it was undoubtedly a great shock to him...

Knowing that, Gerald couldn't really blame Rey for his reaction. After all, Gerald himself was only this nonchalant toward the dead since he was used to seeing corpses by this point. With that in mind, Rey's tolerance toward sights like these would surely rise the more corpses he witnessed in future.

Regardless, it was some time later when Rey finally gathered the courage to look at the corpses again. Once Gerald made sure he was fine, the duo then got to work burying the corpses. Naturally, they buried the girl's parents separately.

Once they were done, Rey couldn't help but growl, "Those people... they're inhumane...!"

While Gerald didn't reply, his solemn expression did the talking for him.

True to Rey's words, the Soul Hunters truly were ruthless to be able to do such brutal acts...

After witnessing all this, Rey was now more determined than ever to become a cultivator. By working hard, he would hopefully be able to prevent scenes like these from happening...

It was at that moment when Gerald raised his head... and floating before him now, were two spirits...

After staring at them for a while, Gerald cleared his throat before righteously declaring, "...Sir and madam... Since you were killed by those people, I'll bestow punishment on them! I'll make sure they can't undergo reincarnation! With that in mind, please rest in peace..."

The two spirits were obviously the girl's parents, and after hearing what Gerald said, the duo then vanished into thin air...

Though he didn't express it, Gerald was honestly feeling relieved. After all, now that they had passed on in peace, they wouldn't end up turning into evil spirits...

Either way, now that they were gone, Gerald drew the Astrabyss Sword before starting to mutter some odd incantations...

The spell Gerald was chanting was known as Soul Eater, and casting it enabled him to completely exterminate villainous spirits. As Gerald had earlier said, any spirits caught within the punishing spell wouldn't be able to be reincarnated...

While Gerald rarely used the spell, he knew he had to use it on the dead Soul Hunters. After all, they deserved this punishment, and Gerald wasn't about to let them die in peace and escape judgment.

Only their souls' annihilation would make Gerald feel that he hadn't let the girl's parents down...

With the chanting complete, Gerald then yelled, "Soul Eater!"

The second he shouted that out, the spirits of the Soul Hunters immediately merged into a white orb or light...

"Exterminate!" yelled Gerald again as he slashed right into the orb of light, causing it to shatter into pieces!

And with that, the punishment was complete. No longer would their souls continue to exist, and they would be incapable of reincarnating anymore...

Witnessing all that Gerald had done, Rey—who had been watching intently from the back—couldn't help but feel that it was all very magical. It certainly made him pumped to become a cultivator who was as powerful as Gerald one day.

Whatever the case was, now that all this was done, Gerald then returned to the room where Juno and the girl were in...

At first glance, the girl had completely calmed down by this point. Even so, she appeared reluctant to say a word... From what Gerald could tell, she was still in a state of shock...

Upon realizing Gerald's presence, Juno immediately pleaded, "Gerald...! Please, help her...!"

Getting what Juno was trying to get him to do, Gerald then asked, "...You're suggesting me to do 'that'? Are you sure?"

Hearing Gerald's question, Juno turned to look at the girl... before closing her eyes and nodding as she said, "...I'm sure. I don't want her to live in despair for as long as she lives...!"

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Chapter 1814

From how serious Juno's gaze was, Gerald could tell how much she wanted to help the girl. With that in mind, Gerald then replied, "...Very well, then!"

Not understanding what the duo was going on about, Rey could only continue staring at them with curious eyes...

Gerald himself began walking toward the girl... before gently placing a finger on her forehead. The second he released his finger, a tiny orb of light was drawn out from the girl's forehead...

Following that, the orb began circling the girl's head... First slowly, then faster... and faster... until eventually, it completely disappeared.

Confused, Rey was prompted to ask, "...What... was that, master...?"

"He just removed her memory... A good chunk of it in fact... Still, it's better for her in the long run as long as she can forget all that's happened today..." explained Juno.

Upon hearing that, Rey was immediately shocked. To think that there existed skills to remove one's

memories...

“...Regardless, the process will also cause her lifespan to shorten, though we don’t exactly know how many years have been taken away from her... Only time will tell...” added Juno.

As with everything in life, there were pros and cons to everything... While the girl was now free of her painful memories, her lifespan had now been decreased. One could only call it the law of equivalent exchange...

Still, ignorance was bliss. As long as the girl could live happily after this, the exchange would be worth it...

Either way, it wasn’t long after before the girl regained consciousness...

Looking at Juna and the other two, the confused girl couldn’t help but ask, “...Who... are you people...?”

“...Ah, you fainted earlier so we saved you!” replied Juno with a smile.

“...Oh? Is that so? I... can’t remember fainting...” muttered the girl as she tried to remember what had happened before... Of course, there was nothing to remember since her memories had been erased.

“Whatever the case is, it’s great that you’re doing fine... Could you tell us your name...?” asked Juno as her smile widened, feeling much more assured now.

Upon hearing that, the girl instantly frowned. What was her name?

Even after thinking for quite a while, she simply couldn't recall what it was. Shaking her head, the vexed girl then replied, "...I... I can't remember..."

Hearing that, Gerald then turned to look at Juno.

Both of them were well aware that there existed a possibility of forgetting quite a bit after undergoing the memory-erasing process... It appeared that the girl had picked the short end of the stick.

"...Do you know where you are?" asked Juno.

Shaking her head, the girl then replied, "No idea... I don't know where this place is at all...!"

Unable to remember her name or even her own home, it was clear that the girl truly had forgotten everything...

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Chapter 1815

The memory erasure technique truly was something else...

Whatever the case was, Gerald then turned to look at Rey before ordering, "...Go see if you can find any books or ID cards belonging to her."

"Roger that!" replied Rey as he instantly began searching around the house.

It wasn't long after before Rey managed to find a book with her name written on it...

Handing the book to Gerald, Rey then said, "Master, I think I've found it! Her name should be Yrsa!"

Taking the book from Rey, Gerald then looked at it before handing it to the girl and saying, "...Yeah, your name appears to be Yrsa!"

Now holding onto the book, the girl couldn't help but furrow her brows, a clear indication that she didn't even recognize the book.

Vexed out of her mind, Yrsa then began shaking her head again as she replied, "...I really can't remember if that's really the case..."

"Don't worry, I'm sure it'll come back to you one day..." consoled Juno.

"I hope so... Still, who are all of you...?" asked Juno in a curious tone.

"...We're... your good friends! While you may not remember us, it's fine since we still remember you," lied Gerald as naturally as he breathed.

Yrsa herself didn't appear to doubt Gerald's words. After all, Yrsa was currently nothing more than a blank slate. Since she knew nothing, the only thing she could do was believe what everyone else told her...

Besides, as she thought about it, she figured that the trio couldn't be villains since they did claim to have saved her...

Her train of thought was cut short when Gerald suddenly asked, "Yrsa... Are you willing to live with us from now on...?"

While she was understandably shocked to hear that, Yrsa eventually nodded as she replied, "...I am. After all, I can't remember anything... You're the only people I know and trust at the moment!"

Hearing that, the three of them breathed sighs of relief. Since she was willing to come along with them, they could at least ensure that she was properly taken care of...

"...Very well, then! Come, let's clean up a bit and get out of here!" declared Gerald, understanding that the place they were currently in wasn't particularly safe.

If the previous Soul Hunters could find this place, then other Soul Hunters would definitely be able to find it as well. With that in mind, the sooner they left, the better.

After quickly packing up, the four of them then left the area...

Naturally, Gerald didn't mention anything about Yrsa's parents. After all, ignorance was bliss. The poor girl didn't need to remember such a painful incident, especially after Gerald had to decrease her lifespan just to make her forget...

Regardless, as the four began venturing into the forest, a Soul Hunter could be seen running toward a tent—that was located at the Soul Hunter's campsite—quite a distance away...

Upon entering, the Soul Hunter instantly reported, "L-leader! We've lost contact with the seventh squad!"

"What? How many people were in that squad?" asked the cloaked man who had been sitting in the tent before his subordinate came running in.

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Chapter List

Chapter 1816

Hearing the deep-voiced man's question, the Soul Hunter then replied, "There were six of them, sir! And none of them can be contacted!"

Upon hearing that, the cloaked man's expression instantly turned ugly. For six men to have lost contact just like that... Something terrible must have happened...!

"When was the last time we were able to contact them?" asked the cloaked man.

"From what we've gathered, they were last heard from near the mountain pass!"

"I see. Order some men to head there immediately. The seventh squad must be found, regardless of whether they're dead or alive!" instructed the cloaked man.

“Loud and clear!” yelled the Soul Hunter as he bolted off to do as he had been told.

Neither of them knew that Gerald and Juno had ended the lives of all six of those men... However, once the cloaked man found out about the deed, he would surely explode in rage...

Even so, it was undeniable that the dead Soul Hunters deserved what they got for being so inhumane.

Regardless, it was about an hour later when the Soul Hunters—who had been sent out to search for the men—returned to the campsite with the six corpses of the seventh squad...

“B-bad news, leader...!” yelled a Soul Hunter as he rushed into the cloaked man’s tent.

“What is it? But first off, calm yourself!” retorted the cloaked man as he glared at his subordinate.

Gulping, the terrified Soul Hunter then reported, “T-the men you sent out to search for the seventh squad... They’ve returned with six corpses! The seventh squad was completely taken out...!”

“What?!” roared the cloaked man furiously as he got up and walked out of his tent.

The second he stepped out, he was instantly greeted by the sight of six corpses laid out in a row... Each of them had deep gashes in their necks...

Clenching his fists tightly, the angered man then growled, "...Who's responsible for this... Who the hell even dares...!"

The cloaked man couldn't just sit still after six of his men had been taken out.

"After examining the corpses, we've found that five of them died in a single slash across the neck! From what we've been able to tell, the assailant wasn't using an ordinary blade either! As for the sixth victim, he died from a slice on his neck as well, though it appears to be from a different blade!" reported a red uniformed Soul Hunter.

The Soul Hunters were divided in rank according to the colors their uniforms were.

Those from the lowest level wore black, and upon promotion, they would be given a red uniform. Only the strongest of the strong would be bestowed with purple uniforms.

Naturally, the cloaked man was still the strongest individual in the organization. While that was a known fact, nobody knew how powerful he really was. In fact, nobody even knew his real name or had any other information about him. He was a truly mysterious individual...

"...I see! As it turns out, our opponents this time aren't ordinary threats!" scowled the cloaked man as he narrowed his eyes.

At that moment, a black-uniformed Soul Hunter came running over before reporting, "Leader! The fifth squad just sent in a report stating that they came across three individuals next to the stream the day before! Though the trio managed to escape, what's interesting to note is that the stream isn't too far off from the mountain pass!"

Hearing that, the cloaked man could already see what the Soul Hunter was trying to say.

Based on the clues they now had, there was a high chance that those three people were responsible for murdering the entire seventh squad...

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“Listen closely and forward my order around! Everyone’s to be fully armed at all times! Also, gather some purple Soul Hunters to hunt down that trio! I want them dead by the end of all this!” yelled the cloaked man after a short pause.

“Loud and clear, leader!” yelled the other Soul Hunters as they raised their fists in response. Gerald and the others had no idea just how much danger they were going to be in soon...

Regardless, it wasn’t long after before the night sky began encroaching in...

By that point, Gerald and his party had set up camp under a large tree and were already grilling the remaining meat over a fire they had started.

Since Rey was chatting with Yrsa, Juno chose to stay by Gerald’s side instead.

There was a brief moment of silence between them, but eventually, Gerald took in a deep breath before saying, “...Hear me out, Juno, but I have an idea of sorts!”

Raising a brow, the amused Juno already had a hunch as to what his idea was.

“Does your idea go along the lines of me accepting Yrsa as my disciple? You want her to grow to become

a cultivator, don't you?" asked Juno straight off the bat.

Surprised that Juno had read him like an open book, Gerald then displayed a serious expression before stating, "...Indeed. Since I've erased all her memories, it should be even easier for her to learn the ways of a cultivator now!"

"You're not wrong there. I'll be honest and say that I've been thinking about that as well. After all, I can't just let you have all the disciples! I want one as well!" replied Juno with a chuckle.

"Then it's settled! I'll see if I can persuade Yrsa then!" replied Gerald, understanding that Yrsa's consent in all this was equally as important. Even so, Gerald strongly believed that she would accept the offer.

With that in mind, he then called Yrsa over to sit by his side.

After obediently coming over, Yrsa then took a seat before asking with a smile, "Yes, brother Gerald? Is there something you wanted to talk about?"

"Indeed! Well, first off there are a few questions we'd like to ask!" replied Gerald with a subtle smile.

"I'll answer what I can!" declared the trusting girl rather enthusiastically. She appeared to really trust Gerald...

"Alright, first off... Do you have any idea what Miss Zorn and I do?" asked Gerald.

Upon hearing that question, Yrsa immediately raised a brow. It was evident that she hadn't thought about it before. Had Gerald not initiated the question, she would've surely remained oblivious to the thought for quite a while...

Regardless, now that Gerald was prompting the question, Yrsa found herself getting increasingly curious about the duo's occupation... After all, humans were naturally curious creatures.

"Not a clue... Mind sharing, brother Gerald...?" asked Yrsa with a sheepish smile.

"Well, we're cultivators!" replied Gerald.

"...Cultivators? What... kind of job even is that...?" asked Yrsa confusedly. It could just be her amnesia, but she had never heard of such a profession before!

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Chapter 1818

"Alright, so listen closely... Humans aren't the only ones who inhabit this planet... There are also souls and ghosts! As cultivators, Miss Zorn and I are tasked with maintaining justice and balance between both worlds!" explained Gerald, much to Yrsa's amazement.

To think that such incredible people who could deal with ghosts existed...

After thinking for a while, she then turned to look at Rey before asking, "...Then... Is Rey also...?"

Chuckling in response, Gerald then replied, "Rey's just joined our team recently, and he's my disciple! Speaking of disciples, I'm telling you all this for a reason. Yrsa, what do you think about becoming Miss Zorn's disciple to become a cultivator? Naturally, it's all up to you and we won't force you if you don't

want to go with that! So, what do you say, Yrsa?”

“How could I say no, brother Gerald? After all, all three of you saved my life! With that said, I fully agree with being Miss Zorn’s disciple! I’ll definitely become an excellent cultivator!” replied Yrsa in a determined tone.

“I’m glad you’re so enthusiastic about it, Yrsa! Still, please understand that once you start, there’s no going back and you can only continue being a cultivator till the day you die... Naturally, you’ll also be facing all sorts of ghosts and souls, so you’ll need to overcome your fear of them as well!” said Gerald.

“Don’t worry, brother Gerald! I’ll definitely do my best! With you and Miss Zorn guiding me along my way, I’m sure I’ll be able to become the best cultivator there is!” declared Yrsa in a confident tone.

“Well said! Now then... Go ahead and pay respect to your master!” said Gerald with a smile as he stood up while signaling Yrsa to face Juno.

Hearing that, Juno and Yrsa got up as well.

Walking over to Juno, Yrsa then declared, “Miss Zorn- no, master! From today onward, please take care of me on my journey of becoming a cultivator!”

Upon hearing that, Juno was unable to hide her satisfied smile. After all this time, she finally had her own disciple...

Rey himself—who had been sitting at the side—was equally as happy. Not only had Yrsa decided to join

their party, but she was going to become a cultivator now too!

“Well said!” replied Juno, unable to contain her excitement.

However, the second she said that, several shadowy figures suddenly bolted out from the forests surrounding them!

Upon seeing that, Gerald and the others immediately stood with their backs against each other, now fully vigilant.

“D*mn it, it’s the Soul Hunters again!” scowled Juno.

Gerald couldn’t help but raise an eyebrow. He didn’t think they would locate them that quickly...

“Take care of Rey and Yrsa, Juno. Now leave while you can! I’ll be taking these people on!” ordered Gerald.

“Loud and clear! Please, be careful!” replied Juno as Gerald summoned his Astrabyss Sword.

Seeing the sword, one of the purple Soul Hunters immediately pointed at it before yelling, “That must be the weapon, brothers!”

With how unique and sharp the blade looked, the Soul Hunters were able to immediately discern that it was the one used to take out the seventh squad...

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Chapter 1819

“You Soul Hunters just don’t know when to give up, do you?” scoffed Gerald as he glared at them.

“Shut it! You killed quite a number of those from our organization, kid! With that in mind, we’re making you pay if it’s the last thing we do!” yelled the leader of the group as he angrily pointed at Gerald.

It was only a second after his sentence ended when the four other Soul Hunters began charging at Gerald!

With how fast these purple Soul Hunters were, Gerald could immediately tell that they were on a different level compared to the black Soul Hunters. After all, aside from their immense speed, they also appeared much stronger. The leader of the organization must have been furious if he was sending so many of his best men over to kill Gerald.

Regardless, it wasn’t long before the five Soul Hunters were attacking Gerald from all directions with multiple techniques. Truth be told, he was just glad that all of them chose to attack him instead of going after his party.

Either way, while the five Soul Hunters appeared strong, they were honestly nothing to Gerald.

With that, Gerald quickly drew a circle around him before yelling, “Wind and Dust Shield!”

The second his incantation ended, strong winds began encircling him! With how strong the wind and dust clouds were, all five of the Soul Hunters ended up getting pushed backward!

While they were stunned, one of them quickly snapped out of it before yelling, "He... He's a cultivator!"

None of them had anticipated bumping into a cultivator all the way out here. No wonder he was so strong!

Snorting in response, Gerald then sneered, "Well, now that you know about this, don't even dream about leaving this place alive!"

Before the Soul Hunters could even react to that, Gerald took a single step forward... and the very next second, he was gone!

The Soul Hunters weren't even able to widen their eyes in time before a crisp slashing sound could be heard... And a split second later, a bloody mist began rising into the air as Gerald drew his blade out from the dead Soul Hunter's chest...!

Despite being fearful when they realized that a single stab was all it took for Gerald to finish off their ally, the remaining Soul Hunters refused to retreat.

After all, the Soul Hunter motto was to never retreat, even when the odds were against them. While having this drilled into their minds definitely made them competent individuals who weren't afraid of death, it was also the reason why all Soul Hunters were destined to end up losing their humanity and turning into cold-blooded beasts.

The inhumane seventh squad that Gerald ended up slaughtering were textbook examples of that statement...

Regardless, as the four Soul Hunters began launching another wave of attacks on Gerald, Gerald simply lifted his blade... and a blinding light suddenly appeared, followed by multiple slashing sounds...!

By the time the light dimmed down, four fresh corpses were already lying in their own puddles of blood...

None of the five Soul Hunters had even come close to being a match against Gerald...

Either way, now that they were dead, Gerald began propping the corpses atop some trees... and once that was done, he used the Soul Hunters' blood to write—with big letters—on the trees, 'They deserved their deaths!'

With that done, he then quickly regrouped with his party to plan their next move...

"First thing's first, I think we should hide our tracks, Gerald! Otherwise, we'll only get tracked down by even more Soul Hunters!"

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Chapter 1820

After hearing Juno's suggestion, Gerald then replied, "Agreed. Let's keep that in mind, then!"

By covering their tracks, they'd at least be able to lower the chances of Soul Hunters finding them again. Gerald really wasn't all that keen on being hunted down day in and day out...

As he was thinking about how much less they would have to worry if they covered their tracks, a thought suddenly came to Gerald.

Taking out the map that Old Flint had given him, Gerald scanned through it for a while before pointing at a town—on the map—and saying, “...Let’s head there next. While the journey will take a little longer, we’ll at least be able to bypass the phosphorite area. Since it’s a town, we’ll also get a chance to resupply there!”

“Anything you say!” replied Juno without the slightest hesitation.

Now that that was decided, the group of four then changed their route and began heading toward the town on the map...

The town itself was known as the Town of Five Elements, and it was aptly named that way due to geographical reasons.

Either way, after traveling for an entire day, the four finally arrived at the entrance of the town. Contrary to the previous lack of humans, the group quickly realized that the town was both lively and busy. In a way, it was almost as though the entire town was a bustling marketplace...

“Everyone! The black market’s putting up a crystal skull for auction! Let’s go check it out!” yelled a young man out of the blue.

Hearing that, many were drawn to his proposal, including Gerald and his party. To think that there’d be a black market in the town!

“Why don’t we go see it too?” said Rey who had always been interested in things like these.

“Sure, why not?” replied Gerald, seeing no reason to refuse. In all honesty, even he was interested to see what else was up for auction.

Following the crowd, all four of them soon arrived at the Town of Five Element’s black market...

From guns, bombs, to even drugs, pretty much everything was sold there! It truly was a fascinating place...

Eventually, the four of them found an empty spot to stand in. However, it wouldn’t be long before a man wearing a hat and leather jacket ascended the stage...

“Greetings, everyone! My name is Mario Grant, and I’m the chief administrator of the black market! I’ll say it right now that the item we’re auctioning today is extremely extraordinary! It wouldn’t be a stretch to say that just seeing it will broaden your horizons! While I’m sure that many of you have already heard about it, I’d like to emphasize that there’s only one of its kind on the planet! With that said, do I even need to elaborate on how rare the treasure is?” declared the man in the leather jacket rather excitedly.

Upon hearing that, the overwhelmed audience instantly began cheering for the item to be shown!

“Very well, then! I present to all of you... the crystal skull! Bring it up on stage!” ordered Mario as one of his subordinates quickly carried a box onto the stage before handing it to the chief administrator.

After receiving it, Mario carefully unlidded the box... and with a grin, he then took the crystal skull out, showing it to the audience as he shouted, “Behold! Our marvelous auction item today, the crystal skull!”

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Chapter 1821

Looking at the crystal skull that Mario was holding onto, everyone below stage couldn't help but cheer in awe, including Gerald and his party. After all, the four individuals hadn't expected to find such a precious treasure out here of all places.

With the skull being so clear and dazzling, it was no wonder why it was capable of making everyone experience a special, indescribable feeling...

Whatever the case was, everyone snapped out of it when Mario cleared his throat before declaring, "Let's start the bidding at four million! To make things clear, each bid increment shouldn't be less than a million! With that out of the way, let the bidding begin!"

"Five million!" yelled a man as he immediately raised his hand.

"Six million!" shouted another man as he further increased the bid.

The way these people were shouting such massive numbers so eagerly could only be compared to water flowing off a waterfall. It was almost as though bidding by the million didn't hurt them at all!

“Seven million! It’s mine!” declared a bespectacled man, almost as though he was sure that nobody would be able to top that.

Even so, this was an auction. As long as one had the money, it was a free for all. With that in mind, nobody even gave a rat’s arse about his statement.

“Can it and scam! I’m paying eight million!” scoffed a fat man as he glared at the bespectacled bidder from before.

With how quickly the numbers were rising, the crystal skull soon exceeded the ten million point. Had these people gone insane?!

“It’s... just a skull, right...? Have these people gone nuts? Do they even understand the value of money...?” exclaimed the astonished Rey.

“Heh. The rich live in a world we can never understand!” replied Gerald with a subtle smile.

While Gerald was certainly rich, he wasn’t interested in just throwing millions of dollars away just for some stupid skull. Money shouldn’t be spent that way!

By the end of it, the crystal skull ended up getting bought by the same bespectacled man at a whopping price of fifteen million!

“Congratulations, mister! With a bid of fifteen million, the crystal skull now belongs to you!” declared Mario.

The bespectacled man himself immediately began indulging himself in the admiration from the crowd.

Seeing how proud and mighty the man now felt, one could say that this was what most rich people strived to feel.

Regardless, with the auction now over, Gerald turned to look at his party before saying, "Let's go, there's nothing else to see here!"

With that, the four then left the black market to continue wandering about the rest of the town...

Not long after, however, they came across the man—who had bought the crystal skull—again.

"Say... isn't that the person who had bought the skull earlier, brother Gerald?" asked Rey, recognizing the bespectacled man.

Nodding in response, Gerald then watched as the man walked right past them, appearing somewhat nervous... Now why was that...?

Having a gut feeling that something interesting would happen if they followed him, Gerald then said, "...Hey, let's sneakily follow him!"

Seeing no reason to object, the trio then began tailing after Gerald who was already ahead of them...

It wasn't too long after before they managed to tail him all the way to a house of sorts...

After scanning his surroundings, the bespectacled man hurriedly entered the house, making sure to lock the door behind him...

“Stay here. I’m going ahead to have a look at what he’s up to!” whispered Gerald as he made a giant leap... before landing right on the house’s roof!

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Chapter 1822

Lying on his stomach, Gerald—who was careful to be quiet as he did all this on the roof—then stared into the yard... Only to see that the bespectacled man was now standing right before Mario! How unexpected!

From the looks of it, they seemed to be discussing something important...

While their meeting was already astonishing enough, what happened next truly shocked Gerald.

Eyes widened, Gerald could only stare as Mario took a dagger from his jacket and stabbed the bespectacled man right in the chest! Mario seemed to have stabbed the man right in the heart too, since the bespectacled man died almost immediately after...

As the bespectacled man flopped lifelessly to the ground, Gerald saw that his eyes were wide open, an evident sign that he wasn’t able to die in peace...

Regardless, with the man now dead, Mario then wiped it clean with a cloth that he had brought along before sliding the dagger back into his jacket...

Following that, Mario then shouted toward the house, prompting two men to come out shortly after.

“Take care of the corpse!” ordered Mario as the two men quickly nodded before stuffing the now dead bespectacled man into a sack and carrying him away...

Of course, Gerald had witnessed all this. Truth be told, he hadn't expected Mario to be such a ruthless person. To think that he would just murder his own client right after obtaining the money... What more, the crystal skull was now his to have again! How cruel!

After seeing all this take place, Gerald was prompted to think, ‘What is even wrong with the world today... How heartless... He's already paid for the item, just let him have it! At the very least, you could have spared his life even if you took the item by force!’

Whatever the case was, Gerald felt lucky that he hadn't bid on the crystal skull back when he was still in the black market. After all, who knows if he could've potentially ended up dying like the bespectacled man...

Either way, Gerald then shook his head before returning to his party.

“Anything interesting happened...?” asked Juno curiously.

“Indeed. The bespectacled man is now dead!” replied Gerald without mincing his words.

“...Huh? But why? And how?” exclaimed Rey, astonished.

“Remember that auctioneer back at the black market? That Mario guy? He killed him!” explained Gerald as he further elaborated what he had earlier saw.

By the time Gerald was done, Rey and the others were momentarily stunned speechless. To think that Mario was actually such an evil person!

“...Since he committed the murder so efficiently... He must have done the same to all the previous clients!” said Juno.

Nodding in response, Gerald then replied, “I believe so as well. These people are making quick bucks without having any losses!”

“How obnoxious!” growled Rey.

Even so, there wasn't really anything the four people could do. After all, the bespectacled man was already dead.

“...Regardless, let's leave this place as soon as possible. Lingering around here is bad news!” said Gerald after a brief pause, now well aware of how evil people could get in this town.

With that, the party of four then began leaving the area...

Unfortunately, since it was already getting dark, Gerald and his party had no choice but to stay the night in town... Interestingly enough, all the accommodation places here resembled ancient inns.

After locating a rather inconspicuous inn, the four then decided to stay the night there...

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Chapter 1823

Upon entering the inn, Gerald saw the innkeeper and called out, "Evening! Any available rooms, boss? We have four people and we require two rooms!"

Looking at them, the innkeeper then asked, "Before that, where do all of you come from?"

While Gerald and his party were rightfully startled, Gerald simply smiled before replying, "We're... From Swindawn City! We're just here for leisure!"

Hearing that, the innkeeper then nodded before saying, "Very well, then. Here are your two room keys! Your rooms are at the end of the corridor on the second floor!"

"Appreciate it, boss!" replied Gerald as he took the keys and began leading his party upstairs.

Following the innkeeper's directions, the group then made their way to the end of the corridor. The ladies were to sleep in the room on the left while Gerald and Rey would sleep in the right one.

Regardless, Gerald quickly locked the door behind him once he and Rey had entered.

Now that they had privacy, Rey was prompted to ask, "...I'm not sure if you've noticed this, but people in this town seem to give outsiders like us strange looks... The innkeeper was no exception either..."

"I have, and I have a gut feeling that the innkeeper isn't a good person either. With that in mind, let's take turns sleeping and keeping watch over the situation. I'll be first to keep watch, and we can switch places later in the night," suggested Gerald.

“Sounds good!” replied Rey, feeling much safer now that Gerald had suggested that.

At that moment, knocking could suddenly be heard coming from Gerald’s door.

Raising a slight brow, Gerald then asked, “Who is it?”

“It’s the innkeeper! I’m here delivering some warm water!” replied the innkeeper as Gerald and Rey exchanged glances with each other.

Signaling for Rey to open the door, Rey then did as he was told.

With the door now open, the innkeeper then entered with a kettle of hot water before placing it on a table.

Watching as the innkeeper smiled at both of them, Gerald then faked a smile as he said, “My, my! How thoughtful of you to deliver hot water to us!”

Chuckling in response, the innkeeper then replied, “It’s only right for me to do so for my customers! Regardless, I’m here to tell you not to head out the inn at night... It’s not too safe out there in the dark. Try to just stay in your rooms!”

Upon hearing that, Gerald and Rey exchanged glances again, wondering what the innkeeper was on about.

“Boss-”

“Got it, boss! We appreciate the warning!” said Gerald as he cut Rey’s sentence short.

Nodding in response, the innkeeper then replied, “Good to hear! Also, if there’s anything you need in the night, don’t hesitate to call me!”

After saying that, the duo then watched as the innkeeper left their room...

Stepping out to make sure that the innkeeper had gone downstairs, the confirmation that he was really gone made Gerald breathe a sigh of relief as he closed the door again.

“About what you did earlier...” muttered Rey.

“Some things aren’t meant to be asked so bluntly, Rey. Remember that,” said Gerald.

Briefly nodding, Rey then asked, “Got it, brother Gerald. Either way... After what just happened, do you still think that the innkeeper is a bad person...?”

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While Rey could tell that something was off about the innkeeper, he simply couldn’t pinpoint what it was, and quite frankly, that was driving him insane.

Shaking his head in response, Gerald then replied, “While I’m not too sure where he’s bad or not, I’m at least certain that there’s a problem with him. After all, I saw him constantly looking around our room earlier, almost as though he was searching for something. My guess is that he must have some secret

here!”

What more, the fact that the innkeeper had told them not to leave their rooms tonight only served to make them more suspicious of him. With that in mind, the curious duo was now keen on unraveling his true nature tonight!

“...Let’s head to Miss Zorn’s room for the moment!” said Gerald.

Rey was thinking the same thing, and with that, both of them then walked out and began knocking on the door opposite of theirs...

“Who is it...?” asked Juno in a similar fashion to how Gerald had asked earlier. It was a clear sign that she was being vigilant as well.

“It’s Gerald!” replied the youth as Juno opened the door a few seconds later.

Seeing that Rey was there as well, Juno was prompted to ask, “Is... something the matter...?”

“Let’s talk inside,” replied Gerald as he and Rey entered her room, only to see that Yrsa herself had been watching television on the bed.

Once she locked the door behind them, Juno then got straight to the point as she asked, “So... What happened?”

“Essentially, both Rey and I feel that the innkeeper is a little off. With that in mind, we’d like you two to come sleep in our room later. We’ll just leave this room empty for the night,” said Gerald.

“I’m assuming you’re trying to use our current room as bait to test the innkeeper for foul play...?” asked Juno who was quick to catch on.

“Couldn’t have said it better myself,” replied Gerald with a firm nod.

“Well, alright then! Give us some time to wash up first then! We’ll head to your room once we’re done!” said Juno, now fully in on the plan.

With that settled, Gerald and Rey then went back to their room first.

It was about ten minutes later when Juno and Yrsa came over as well.

While it was certainly cramped, the four of them sharing a room would certainly make things much safer. After all, if the innkeeper truly was a despicable and lusty person, then having the two girls sleep in their own room was definitely a terrible idea.

While it was true that Juno was a strong cultivator, none of them could say for sure that the innkeeper didn’t have special means to deal with them.

Whatever the case was, now that all four of them were here, Gerald then said, “Alright, you girls sleep on the bed while Rey and I sleep on the table. In case you’re worrying about a midnight attack, Rey and I will be taking turns keeping watch the entire night. If anything happens, we’ll surely alert you girls!”

After saying that, Gerald and Rey then sat on the table.

Juno and Yrsa themselves got into bed and promptly fell asleep... This was going to be a long night for the boys...

Fast forward to a few hours later, it was late into the night, and not a single sound could be heard... It was honestly a bit scary.

Even so, the silence was what eventually gave away the tapping of approaching footsteps that stopped right before their door...

Staring at their room door, Gerald and Rey were now fully vigilant...

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Slowly moving toward the door, Gerald then peeked through the peephole... and almost immediately after, his eyes widened when he realized that the innkeeper was standing right in front of Juno's room!

Retrieving what appeared to be some kind of incense out from his pocket, Gerald watched as the innkeeper then lit it before placing it by Juno's door... From the looks of it, he was doing so, so that the smoke would seep into her initial room...

With that done, Gerald quickly backed away when he realized that the innkeeper was now walking toward his room!

By this point, Juno and the others were wide awake.

After seeing Gerald's reactions, Juno couldn't help but whisper, "...What's wrong, Gerald...?"

Cupping his hand over his mouth, Gerald then took a towel before cupping his mouth and nose with it.

Immediately understanding what Gerald was trying to relay, the others got their own towels and did the same as Gerald made sure to open the room's window as well.

Soon enough, everyone watched as white smoke began seeping into the room through the bottom of the door... Had Gerald not opened the window, the room would've been filled with smoke in seconds!

Regardless, Gerald and Rey's hunch had apparently been correct. The innkeeper really did have vile intentions... After all, why else would he do something this shady in the dead of night?

It was lucky that they suspected him. Otherwise, they would've surely gone fully unconscious by now...

Either way, Gerald peered through the peephole again after a short while to see if the innkeeper was still there.

While Gerald was thankful that the innkeeper was no longer there, it confused Gerald as to why he just left like that. After all, he had already gone through the trouble of doing all this!

After thinking about it for a while, Gerald then headed to the bed before lying down... and right after that, he freed his soul from his body!

Naturally, Rey didn't know that Gerald was having an out-of-body experience, causing him to instantly

widen his eyes in shock when Gerald suddenly appeared deeply unconscious.

Just as he was about to check on Gerald, Juno raised her hand, signaling for Rey not to move.

Upon seeing that, Rey realized that Gerald was doing this on purpose. With that in mind, he then returned to his seat...

As for Gerald, his soul was already drifting around the inn. He was going to get to the bottom of what vile things the innkeeper had planned if it was the last thing he did! Soon after, he found the innkeeper leading two men upstairs...

Raising a brow, Gerald then followed the trio all the way to Juno's initial room! Of course, none of the men could see or even detect Gerald's presence in his current form.

"The two ladies are in that room, Mr. Panther! They've both been knocked clean out with my bewitching incense!" said the innkeeper with a sinister smile as he looked at the sturdy-looking man beside him.

"Good job!" replied Mr. Panther as he nodded in satisfaction, prompting the innkeeper to retrieve the room's spare key...

Once Juno's initial room was open, all three of the men entered...

However, they quickly found themselves stunned when they realized that the room was completely empty!

"...And where are they?" asked the flabbergasted Mr. Panther.

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Chapter 1826

“...Huh? That... That’s impossible! I’m sure they were in this room not too long ago!” exclaimed the puzzled innkeeper.

“...Are you trying to make a fool out of me?” growled the clearly pissed off Mr. Panther as he grabbed the innkeeper by his collar!

“I-I wouldn’t even dream of pranking you, Mr. Panther! I swear on my life that they really were here earlier!” explained the terrified innkeeper.

Before Mr. Panther could even retort, he was suddenly flung out of the room by what appeared to be a sudden strong gust of wind! In truth, the ‘wind’ was, in fact, Gerald, who had just rushed toward Mr. Panther and grabbed the man by his neck!

However, since the others couldn’t see Gerald in his current form, the duo could only stare in confusion, completely unaware of what was really happening.

Whatever the case was, with one strong squeeze, a sickening snap could be heard... Gerald had just broken Mr. Panther’s neck!

Knowing full well now that Mr. Panther had had dirty thoughts on Juno and Yrsa, there was no way he was ever going to show mercy on the b*stard...

Upon realizing that Mr. Panther was now dead, the terrified innkeeper and the other man instantly began panicking as they attempted to run for their lives! Sadly for them, Gerald wasn't about to spare anyone tonight.

Flying straight after them, Gerald then easily kicked both men across the inn's corridors!

While the other man instantaneously died from the kick, the terror-stricken innkeeper was still alive.

Now lying on the ground, the innkeeper was so frightened that he barely registered that his bladder had just given in...

Unsure what to even do, the innkeeper then began begging for mercy as he knelt on the ground. To be quite frank, Gerald found the man's pitiful crying and begging to be rather amusing.

With that in mind, Gerald then stood before the innkeeper before suddenly making himself visible.

Glaring straight into the confused and terrified innkeeper's eyes, Gerald then said, "I knew something was wrong with you... I'm glad I trusted my gut! Regardless, do share with me what you were planning to do to us tonight..."

Since Gerald was currently in his ghost form, he looked downright terrifying, so much so, in fact, that the innkeeper quickly found himself passing out!

Seeing that, Gerald couldn't help but snicker. Still, he wasn't about to let the innkeeper off that easily.

With that, Gerald then lifted the unconscious man up before tying him to a chair with some strong rope.

Following that, he made sure to lock the inn's entrance as tightly as possible to ensure that nobody would find out about what had happened inside the building. With that done, Gerald then quickly disposed of Mr. Panther's body.

After cleaning up the scene, he then bolted back to his physical body... causing Rey to almost die of shock when the previously 'unconscious' Gerald suddenly sat up!

"B-brother Gerald...! You're awake! What happened just now? Why did you end up passing out all of a sudden?" asked the bewildered Rey once he snapped out of his shock.

Realizing that Rey didn't know about his out-of-body capabilities, Gerald simply said, "You'll find out about it one day!"

Naturally, that only made Rey feel even more confused about all this. Even so, since Gerald wasn't willing to tell him about it now, he believed that there was a reason for that. Due to that, Rey didn't press Gerald for answers.

"Either way, it's safe for us to go out and have a look around now!" said Gerald as he opened the room's door and began walking downstairs...

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Chapter 1827

Upon arriving downstairs, all four of them were greeted by the sight of the innkeeper tied to a chair, his lowered head making it evident that he had fallen unconscious...

“...Huh? What... on earth happened to him, brother Gerald...?” asked the surprised Rey.

Chuckling in response, Gerald then smiled faintly as he replied, “He’s just passed out from shock, I’d say!”

Following that, Gerald got a glass of water before splashing it all over the innkeeper’s face!

Immediately waking up, the innkeeper’s expression turned fearful as he began screaming, “G-ghost...! Ghosts...!”

However, before he could scream any further, he received a tight slap on his left cheek from Gerald!

Gerald had done so to calm the innkeeper down, and as he had predicted, it worked. Now pacified, the dazed innkeeper couldn’t help but stare at the four individuals standing before him...

Since Gerald’s physical form was vastly different from his ghost form, the innkeeper wasn’t able to realize that Gerald had done the deed earlier. With that in mind, the innkeeper could only ask in a shaky voice, “...Who... Who the hell are you people...?”

Hearing that, Gerald was slightly pleased. After all, the fact that the innkeeper didn’t know that he was the culprit of the earlier incidents meant that Gerald could get off scot-free.

Regardless, Gerald didn’t want to waste too much time with him. With that, he glared at the innkeeper before asking, “Before that... Tell us, boss. What exactly is your relationship with Mr. Panther...?”

Upon hearing that, the innkeeper instantly lowered his head, clearly not daring to say a word.

“Hmm? Not willing to cooperate? I don’t mind. Just so you know, I’m skilled in the art of torture! Mark my words, you’ll talk sooner or later!” sneered Gerald rather excitedly as he summoned his Astrabyss Sword. He had honestly been waiting for a chance to finally use sadistic tactics to force a vile individual to confess.

Staring wide-eyed at the sword, the innkeeper could help but gulp before meekly saying, “I-I’ll talk...! Just don’t hurt me...! Look, Mr. Panther and I are partners! He started this inn and I’m responsible for managing it! Every time someone stays at the inn, I’ve to inform him about it! With that done, what usually follows is that I’ll use my bewitching incense to make the customers fall into a deep slumber... And when they wake up, they’ll find themselves under his control! By that point, Mr. Panther can freely begin extorting money from the customers!”

As it turned out, the inn they had chosen to stay in belonged to some kind of gangster who extorted his customer’s money! Unfortunately for Mr. Panther and the innkeeper, they hadn’t anticipated having to deal with Gerald and his party... As a result, Mr. Panther ended up tragically losing his life...

Whatever the case was, Rey then stepped forward, glaring at the innkeeper as he angrily asked, “Tell me... Just how many times have you done this...?”

“J-just three times...! After all, not many people come to our inn in the first place...!” cried out the terrified innkeeper.

“So that makes us the third group, then?” asked Rey.

“N-no... you’re actually the fourth...” muttered the innkeeper... only to receive a tight slap across his other cheek the second his sentence ended!

Though Rey had just slapped him, the innkeeper was far too terrified to even make a sound...

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Chapter 1828

“...Well I’ll be d*mned!” declared Rey.

“Hmm? What is it, Rey?” asked Gerald as he raised a slight brow.

“Well, you never told me before that slapping others could be this fun!” replied Rey with a sheepish grin.

Upon hearing that, Gerald and the girls could only roll their eyes in response. What an irritating yet amusing lad...

“Let’s not get too childish, shall we?” muttered Gerald with a sigh as Rey laughed embarrassedly while scratching the back of his head.

“Regardless, what should we do with him, brother Gerald? Should we dispose of him?” asked Rey as he made a slicing gesture on his neck, evidently hinting at decapitation.

“P-please don’t do it, brothers! I now realize the errors in my ways! So please, please, don’t kill me...!” exclaimed the panicking innkeeper as he begged for mercy.

To think that him wanting to earn a quick buck would lead to such a life-threatening situation...! He didn't sign up for this! He didn't want to die!

"Hmm... Well, while he is evil, he's not completely unforgivable... Let's just leave now that we've taught him a good lesson!" said Gerald in a calm tone as he stared at the innkeeper.

Gerald, for one, wasn't a completely unreasonable person. He could tell that the innkeeper had only done all this for the sake of money, and now that he had been threatened so much, Gerald believed that the innkeeper wouldn't dare to repeat the same mistake in the future.

What more, Mr. Panther was already dead, so the innkeeper wouldn't be able to continue committing such vile practices anyway. With that in mind, Gerald didn't mind sparing him.

Upon realizing that Gerald was sparing him, the innkeeper was instantly overjoyed. After all, as long as he could continue living, all was right in the world.

"T-thank you, big brother...! I won't ever do such things again...!" cried out the innkeeper.

"You'd better not. If I ever find out that you do, you only have yourself to blame when I come after you mercilessly! Though by that point, you'll simply be accompanying Mr. Panther... I'm sure you catch my drift?" warned Gerald with an intense glare.

"L-loud and clear...! I'll run my inn properly, I swear!" replied the innkeeper as he nodded profusely.

"Well said. Regardless, let's pack up and leave early!" said Gerald as the other three immediately agreed.

The Town of Five Elements really wasn't a good place to be in... With that in mind, it would be best that they left town as soon as possible before anything really bad happened...

Regardless, it was about ten minutes later when Gerald and his party finished packing up.

While they had decided to spare the innkeeper, they weren't letting him off the hook that easily. With that in mind, they dragged the tied-up innkeeper—who was still stuck to the same chair—all the way to the front of the inn and left him there. Once dawn came, the citizens could free him on their own.

With that done, Gerald and his party then set off to continue their journey. Since it was still about an hour before daylight, the entire town was enveloped in silence, the only sounds being the low hum of streetlights...

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Chapter 1829

"As they walked on, Rey was prompted to ask, "...Say... Do you think the innkeeper will get people to attack us as revenge, brother Gerald...?"

Turning to look at Rey, Gerald then calmly replied, "Probably not. Even if he does try to get his revenge, it's not like we can't deal with anything he throws at us. I'm sure he understands that failing to take me out will grant him a one-way ticket to hell!"

Gerald himself felt that the innkeeper wouldn't dare to cause them any further trouble. After all, he had made sure to strike deep fear into that man.

“...I see! Speaking of which, how exactly did the innkeeper get tied up to the chair in the first place...?” asked Rey who had been dying to find out.

“...Hmm? Do you really wish to know?” replied Gerald in a somewhat playful tone.

Watching as Rey nodded, Gerald simply said, “While I’d love to tell you more about it, it’s not something you should be made aware of yet at your current stage. Again, don’t worry. I’ll definitely tell you once you’re ready.”

“Alright...” mumbled the disappointed Rey, understanding that Gerald felt that he wasn’t strong enough to even learn about what Gerald had done yet.

“No need to feel down. As long as you train properly, you’ll surely learn about it in the near future!” said Gerald with a smile.

Hearing that, Rey simply nodded in response. After all, he knew that Gerald wouldn’t go back against his word.

Either way, it wasn’t long after before the sun began brightening the sky...

Since they hadn’t slept much at all last night, the exhausted Rey couldn’t help but say, “...Um... Why don’t we find someplace to rest first, brother Gerald...? After all, we weren’t able to sleep a wink last night!”

Upon hearing that, Gerald turned to look at Juno and Yrsa who looked equally as worn out.

“I have to agree with Rey, Gerald... We really should stop to take a short rest... We’re already quite a distance from the Town of Five Elements, so I’m sure nobody will be catching up to us anytime soon...” added Juno.

While it was true that Juno had entered the Avatar Realm—just like Gerald—it didn’t mean that she was incapable of feeling tired. What more, while she and Gerald shared a realm, Gerald was already at the Heavenly Emperor stage. With that in mind, he wouldn’t ever get tired and his energy would always be maintained at a comfortable level.

Even so, he understood that the others still needed rest, which was why he then replied, “Alright, let’s take a short break then!”

Hearing that Gerald had agreed to it, Rey instantly breathed a sigh of relief, making it evident that he had assumed that Gerald wouldn’t have agreed to it.

Either way, they soon came across a rocky cave and decided to have their rest inside.

However, aside from the fact that it was pitch black in there, there also appeared to be a foul odor that could be smelled, even from the cave’s entrance...

“My god! What is that stench!” grumbled Rey as he covered his nose with a frown.

Now that they were right at the cave’s opening, the smell was so terrible that it was almost vomit-inducing...

Before anyone could even reply, however, a roar of thunder could suddenly be heard in the quickly

darkening sky...

“Great! A thunderstorm now...?” yelled the annoyed Rey as he stared at the sky.

Trouble just kept on coming! What a difficult life!

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Chapter 1830

The second his sentence ended, a dazzling flash of purple raced through the sky.

With that, the four knew that their only choice was to bear the smell and seek shelter in the cave till the storm ended...

“...As much as it pains me to say this, let’s just take cover in that cave first...We’ll continue the journey once the storm dies down!” said Gerald as the trio naturally agreed.

After all, with all that lightning in the sky, staying in the cave was definitely the safer option. Their minds made up, the four then went a little deeper in before sitting on the ground.

While Juno and Yrsa closed their eyes as they sat arm in arm—while leaning against each other—against the cave’s walls, Gerald and Rey sat on the opposite end to rest instead.

Though the stench was terrible, had it not been for the cave, they would’ve gotten drenched in the rain by now...

Soon enough, the comforting sound of rain and thunder caused all four of them to relax even further. It was as though all their worries were being washed away...

Even so, good things never lasted.

It wasn't long after when two shiny dots appeared from deeper within the cave... As the beady orbs grew closer and closer, a flash of lightning revealed that the tiny orbs were the eyes of a giant python!

Despite how close it now was to Rey, he was sleeping like a log. The other resting trio wasn't able to detect the python's presence either.

At some point, the python began nudging Rey's shoulder, causing Rey to get slightly annoyed.

"Gah... Stop playing around... Let me sleep a little longer...!" mumbled Rey—who still had his eyes closed—as he attempted to brush the python's head away...

Upon realizing how scaly whatever had been nudging him was, Rey instantly opened his eyes in shock. Gulping as he slowly turned to look at what he was touching... Rey's heart skipped several beats when he realized that a giant python was right next to him!

Scared half to death, Rey instantly shrieked as he fumbled to his feet while yelling, "Good god!"

Hearing Rey's screams, the trio instantly woke up, prompting Gerald to ask, "Rey? What's wrong?"

"P-p-p-python...! Giant Python...!" yelled Rey as he pointed at the snake.

Now fully awake, the others quickly realized that the massive python was staring straight at them!

Realizing that the girls had just stood up in their shock, Gerald quickly ordered, "Don't move any further!"

Upon hearing that, the trio froze in place, not daring to move an inch.

"Alright... Once you've calmed yourselves, begin backing away slowly... Emphasis on the 'slowly' part!" instructed Gerald.

Nodding subtly, Juno then began doing as Gerald had told... Taking small steps backward, she barely even dared to breathe...

Meanwhile, the giant python itself had locked its gaze on Gerald...

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Chapter 1831

Hiss!

The next second, the giant python hissed at Gerald.

Then, it launched an attack and charged toward Gerald at top speed.

Gerald moved sideways immediately to dodge the attack.

“Find a place and hide quickly!”

Taking advantage of the opportunity, Gerald shouted at Juno and the other two.

The three reacted immediately after hearing Gerald’s words, and they quickly found a tree and hid behind it.

After all, the giant python could only deal with one person at a time. So, they should just leave it to Gerald.

Although the giant python had failed in its first attack, that didn’t mean that it would give up. It turned around and rushed toward Gerald once more.

As its huge body moved on the ground, it felt as though the ground had started to shake.

The giant python rushed toward Gerald and raised its head, trying to hit him.

If he was hit by the giant python, he would definitely faint even if he didn’t die on the spot.

However, Gerald would not let the giant python win, and he summoned his Astrabyss Sword.

Slash!

He slashed it.

Thus, the head of the giant python was chopped off by Gerald.

Hiss!

The giant python hissed to the sky, screaming painfully and terribly.

The ground was soaked in blood in an instant, and the head of the giant python fell into the pool of blood on the ground

“Beast, you can’t simply kill me!”

Gerald glared at the giant python and shouted angrily.

Having said that, Gerald leaped from the ground and thrust his sword directly into the body of the giant python.

The giant python trembled violently and fell onto the ground, dead.

With just two simple and crisp moves, Gerald finished off the giant python.

“Alright. It’s okay now!”

After dealing with the giant python, Gerald shouted at the three.

Only then did Juno and the others come out from behind the tree and go near the body of the giant python.

“This python is horribly huge!”

Rey couldn’t help but say in awe.

It was indeed their first time seeing a giant python this big. It was even two times bigger than the bear they had seen last time.

“The wild boar we met previously was also very big. Do all the animals here share the same trait? They are all so large?”

Juno voiced her thoughts immediately.

“Maybe it’s because of the red phosphorus, which has caused certain mutations in the genes of these animals!”

Gerald explained briefly.

“Anyway, this fellow has sent us food. I heard that snake meat is really delicious, and I have never tried it before!” Rey looked at the giant python and said.

“All you think about is food. If it weren’t for me, you would have already been eaten by this giant python!”

Gerald commented peevishly.

“Um. Brother Gerald, we have you, right? I know you won’t let such things happen to me.”

Rey hurriedly smiled at Gerald and said.

It couldn’t be helped, but he was not as capable as Gerald. If he was, he would certainly have taken the initiative and stood out to deal with the giant python.

“Alright, stop flattering me. Go and collect the snake meat. I will make a fire, and we will have a barbeque. We’ll continue our journey after the meal.”

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Chapter 1832

Gerald instructed Rey helplessly.

When Rey heard his words, he immediately walked over to the giant python excitedly and squatted down to pick it up.

Soon after, Gerald had already started the fire, and he began grilling the snake meat over the fire.

“Brother Gerald, I told you that the cave would not be that simple. It was so smelly, but I didn’t expect it to be a snake cave!”

Rey looked at Gerald as he spoke. He felt that the cave from earlier had been rather strange because of the smelly odor, and sure enough, there was really an animal living here.

The sleeping giant python had probably come out of the cave to check on them because they must have unknowingly disturbed it.

Ultimately, the giant python had still died in the hands of Gerald and become their food.

It couldn’t be helped since this was how the food chain worked. Their life and death were determined by God.

The giant python was just unlucky to have met Gerald and the three others.

After half an hour or so, the snake meat was finally done, and it smelled very fragrant.

Grilled snake meat was a rare delicacy that not everyone had the chance to taste even if you were in the city.

However, this time, Gerald and the three were considered lucky as the meat of one python was enough to feed all of them.

After cleaning up, Gerald and his friends began enjoying their meal at the entrance of the cave.

After the meal, they had finally filled their stomachs.

Frankly speaking, the snake meat was indeed very delicious.

“Buuurp!”

Rey let out a long burp when he felt full.

“I’m so full! I’ve never tasted such tasty snake meat before. This is the first time in my life. It’s so delicious!”

Rey exclaimed with a satisfied face.

Snake meat was not something just anyone could eat.

After all, snake meat was prohibited in the market.

However, it was different here. No one could stop them from eating it. Therefore, they would naturally enjoy it to the fullest.

After satisfying their hunger, the four cleaned up and departed again.

The weather outside had already calmed down, and there was no more lightning and thunder. The whole forest was back to life with birds chirping everywhere.

“Gerald, have we bypassed the phosphorite area?”

On the way, Juno asked Gerald curiously.

When Gerald heard her, he took out his map and checked on it.

After looking at the map for a while, Gerald replied, “We’ve almost bypassed the phosphorite area. Just a few kilometers more.”

The phosphorite area covered a very vast area after all.

From yesterday until now, Gerald and his friends hadn’t stopped moving. So, they traveled a long distance in just a short time.

However, there were still a few kilometers more before they would have bypassed the phosphorite area completely.

“Do you think the soul hunters will catch up with us?”

Juno looked at Gerald and asked in concern.

Gerald shook his head immediately.

“I don’t think so. They shouldn’t know that we have left the phosphorite area and taken another route.

However, they might have already gotten out of the phosphorite area before us. This is what I worry about the most.”

Gerald said, slightly cocking his eyebrows.

This was the problem that was the most worrisome to Gerald.

If the soul hunters got out of the phosphorite area before the four of them, it would mean that they would keep on encountering the soul hunters on their path.

It would be different if it was the other way round. If Gerald and the others walked out of the phosphorite area before the soul hunters, Gerald and the three would have the advantage, and they would not have to be so submissive.

“We should hurry up, then. We must not let the soul hunters get ahead of us, or we would have to be on the passive side!”

Juno understood Gerald’s concern and reminded them immediately.

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Chapter 1833

The journey of a few kilometers was not very long, and Gerald and the others took only two hours to complete the journey.

Once Gerald and his friends were out of the forest, they turned around and looked behind them.

At the sight of it, they knew that they had left the phosphorite area.

Behind them, there was a huge mountain rich in red phosphorus. This meant that they had exited the phosphorite area.

“We’ve finally gotten out of the phosphorite area!”

When Rey saw it, he burst out in excitement.

Swish! Swish! Swish!

However, as soon as those words had left Rey’s mouth, dozens of black shadows descended from the stone wall around them.

The black shadows surrounded the four right away.

That’s right. They were the soul hunters.

Seeing this, Gerald and Juno’s faces changed drastically. They didn’t expect that the situation they feared the most would truly happen.

Murphy’s Law was indeed true.

Things that could go wrong would always go wrong.

Sure enough, the soul hunters had gotten out of the phosphorite area ahead of them and hidden here, waiting for Gerald and the other three to ambush them.

“Don’t move!”

One purple soul hunter came out of the crowd and warned the four, pointing at them.

The soul hunters took out their crossbows and aimed the arrows at Gerald and the others.

Gerald and his friends didn’t dare to move since a dozen crossbows were aiming at them. The moment they made a move, the arrows of the other party would pierce through their bodies.

It was useless even when Gerald was very powerful since Rey and Yrsa were with them. He had to consider their safety as well instead of just thinking of ensuring his own safety.

“Go and tie them up!”

Shortly after, the purple soul hunter ordered the men beside him sternly.

A few black soul hunters went forward with ropes and tied Gerald and the other three up tightly.

“Let’s bring them back to the campsite to see the leader!”

After tying them up, the purple soul hunter ordered again, and they brought the four away.

About ten minutes later, they arrived at a big campsite.

This campsite was the headquarters of the soul hunters.

The purple soul hunter brought the four of them to the leader's tent right away.

"Leader, I want to report to you that we have caught the four people and brought them back. They are currently waiting outside the tent, waiting for you to decide their punishment!"

The purple reported to the man in the cloak in the tent.

Hearing the news, the face of the man in the cloak changed immediately.

"Bring them in!"

Then, they heard the order of that man.

Once he had said that, the purple soul hunter walked out of the tent and dragged the four inside.

Once inside, the four of them stood in front of the man in the cloak.

The man stared at them.

"So, you are the ones who keep pestering us?"

The man in the cloak questioned Gerald and his friends.

“So, you must be the leader of the soul hunters.”

Gerald didn't answer. Instead, he asked the man in the cloak in return.

Hearing Gerald's question, the man in the cloak immediately locked his gaze on Gerald.

They stared into each other's eyes, neither one willing to give in.

In an instant, Gerald and the man in the cloak released their powerful auras.

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Chapter 1834.

Upon feeling Gerald's aura, the man in the cloak was startled. He didn't expect that Gerald would use his aura to fight against his own aura. Moreover, his aura was not weak at all, showing that Gerald was not an ordinary person.

However, the other people in the surrounding area were almost out of breath because of their strong auras.

The auras of these two men were far too strong.

"You are very special!"

Finally, the man in the cloak withdrew his aura and said to Gerald with an interested expression.

"Heh. It's nothing."

Gerald replied calmly with an indifferent look on his face.

"What exactly is your purpose for coming here?"

The man in the cloak continued to question Gerald.

"Would you believe me if I told you we are just here for a vacation?"

Gerald countered the man in the cloak's question without showing any inferiority.

"Ha! Ha! Ha!"

Hearing Gerald's words, the man in the cloak burst into laughter.

"Vacation? Do you really think that I'm a three-year-old kid? Do you honestly think I can't see what's special about you guys? You must be here for the Phangrottom Clan."

The man in the cloak snorted at once and directly stated the purpose Gerald and the other three had come for.

Having said that, the man in the cloak raised his hand and snapped his finger.

Immediately, the purple soul hunter came in, carrying a book and a map in his hands.

The purple soul hunter handed the two things to the man in the cloak.

Seeing this, the faces of Gerald and the others became grave. They knew that their secret couldn't be hidden anymore. They had been completely discovered.

"Why? Are you still planning to act dumb in front of me? You are surely here for the Phangrottom Clan!"

The man in the cloak stared at Gerald coldly and said.

“Since you have found out about it, we don’t have anything else to say. So, what do you want?”

Gerald did not try to hide it any longer, and he questioned the man in the cloak straightforwardly.

Frankly speaking, this one organization was not a problem for Gerald at all. He could easily kill them all. However, Gerald had to take Rey and Yrsa into account, and that was why he hadn’t made a move.

“I know you can read this map. I hope you can cooperate with us to search for the Phangrottom Clan. That way, I will spare your lives. This is a good bargain!”

The man in the cloak proposed his idea directly toward Gerald.

“What if I don’t agree to it?”

Gerald replied indifferently.

“You don’t agree? Hah! Do you think you have any room to bargain with me?”

The man in the cloak sneered.

As soon as he said that, a few soul hunters came in, aiming their crossbows at Gerald and his friends.

Gerald knew that the man in the cloak was trying to pressure him forcefully.

“Alright. I can work with you. However, you can’t have any thoughts about us, and you must return all of our things to us.”

After a pause, Gerald agreed and told him his condition.

“Sure, no problem. As long as you cooperate with us, we won’t do anything to you guys!”

The man in the cloak agreed to it promptly.

Soon after, the man in the cloak returned their belongings to the four of them.

In truth, the most important thing was still Gerald’s map.

The map that Master Snyder had given to Gerald was the key to finding the entrance of the path to the Phangrottom Clan. More importantly, Gerald was the only one who could decipher the map.

After packing up, Gerald and his friends departed with a dozen soul hunters.

“Brother Gerald, what should we do now? Are we really bringing them to the Phangrottom Clan?” On the way, Rey whispered to Gerald.

Chapter 1835.

“Don’t worry. We’ll see how it goes. You guys try to find an opportunity to escape first. Leave them to me!”

Gerald looked at Juno and the other two as he reminded them.

They nodded.

“Gerald, the leader of the soul hunters is not weak. You must be careful.”

Juno reminded Gerald once more.

Gerald was well aware. Judging from the previous duel between him and the man, Gerald knew that the power of that man was not weak. He was a problem, but it did not mean that Gerald was not his match.

“Yes. Don’t worry. I’ll be careful!”

Gerald looked at Juno and nodded.

The man in the cloak was coming for the Phangrottom Clan. So, Gerald would certainly not let him get what he wanted so easily, much less allow them to gain the ability to control ghosts.

Soon, they arrived at the edge of a canyon.

There was only one wooden bridge in the canyon, and the structure looked very shaky. Just by looking at it, you would know that it was not safe.

However, Gerald and the rest had no way back. This was the only path to enter the most feminine place. It was a path they had to take no matter what.

Gerald and the three others stood near the bridge and looked across the mountain peaks.

“The distance between the canyon must be at least a hundred meters wide, and it’s windy. It’s not going to be easy!”

Gerald blurted out.

“What’s wrong, Gerald? What are you worried about?”

When Juno heard him, she immediately asked Gerald in confusion.

“This wooden bridge is not that easy to cross.”

Gerald said firmly with a serious face.

Right then, the man in the cloak and a few soul hunters walked toward them.

“Why did you stop?”

The man in the cloak stared at them and asked.

“The bridge is not easy to cross. If we get on the bridge hastily, it might be dangerous!”

Gerald looked at him and said.

“Huh! Stop all your crap! I don’t care if it’s dangerous or not. I’m sure you have a way to cross the bridge.”

The man in the cloak didn’t bother at all and replied with a sneer.

Hearing his words, Gerald knew he didn’t have a choice.

“Alright, then. We’ll go first, and you follow us carefully!”

Gerald told them indifferently.

Having said that, Gerald took one step forward.

But before Gerald could move forward, the man in the cloak stopped him.

“What is it?”

When the man stopped Gerald, Gerald frowned and asked coldly.

“You can’t go ahead of us. Who knows if you will play dirty tricks?” said the man in the cloak.

When Gerald heard his words, he was irritated. He had an urge to finish off the man in the cloak and the soul hunters all at once.

If it was not because of their numbers, Gerald wouldn't have compromised.

"Okay, okay. In that case, let your men go first, and we will walk in the middle!"

Gerald said helplessly and made an inviting hand gesture.

Seeing Gerald's attitude, the man in the cloak was very satisfied. Then, he immediately signaled a few purple soul hunters behind him.

The purple soul hunters understood it right away and got on the bridge, leading the group.

As for Gerald and the other three, they followed closely behind the purple soul hunters. The man in the cloak and the rest of his men followed behind Gerald, completely surrounding Gerald and his friends in the middle.

As they walked on the wooden bridge, Gerald felt more and more uneasy. He had an ominous feeling that the wooden bridge was not as simple as it looked.

The most feminine place was definitely not that easy to find. With only one wooden bridge between the canyon, didn't it seem way too easy?

"Gerald, why do you look so sick?"

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Chapter 1836.

Juno noticed Gerald's expression and asked him in concern.

"I'm just worried that it might not be this easy to cross the bridge. I have an ominous feeling!"

Gerald explained with a serious face.

When Juno heard him, she looked around but did not see anything unusual.

"Are you just being too careful?"

Juno asked suspiciously.

Gerald shook his head in denial.

"It's not possible. I'm not merely being careful. I simply have this gut feeling!"

Boom!

As soon as Gerald said that, a loud explosion rang in the entire canyon.

The crowd immediately looked to the left side of the canyon, as the sound came from that direction.

The whole canyon was so dark that they couldn't see the situation clearly. Besides, the sky was also turning dark with black clouds forming in the sky. This was certainly not a good sign.

The next second, something happened that stunned everyone.

A swarm of black insects flew out from the left side of the canyon and rushed directly toward them.

"What's that?"

Someone asked in surprise.

However, nobody knew what that was. They only knew that it was not a good thing.

"Let's go! Quick!"

Gerald reacted quickly and told the three behind him.

Having said that, Gerald and the three ran forward at top speed.

However, it was not as simple as it seemed. The few purple soul hunters in front of them had suddenly been crushed to death by falling stones from the mountains, and those stones blocked their way directly.

"D*mn it! Brother Gerald, the path is blocked. What should we do now?"

Seeing this, Rey asked Gerald in shock.

At the moment, both ends of the path were blocked by the stones, and Gerald and the rest had nowhere else to go.

Not only that, but they also had to face the swarm of flying insects.

Gerald turned around and looked behind him.

The soul hunters were already taking out their crossbows to attack the insects.

However, how could their crossbows possibly deal with the insects? They were simply wasting their energy.

“Argh!”

Following that, cries of misery and screams were heard.

The screams rang through the entire canyon.

A few soul hunters were surrounded by the insects, and in just a few minutes, they had already turned into piles of bones.

Seeing this, everyone was shocked.

“Rey, take out the clothes in your bag!”

Rey suddenly thought of something and instructed Rey, who was behind him, immediately.

Rey reacted swiftly and took out a piece of clothing, giving it to Gerald.

Then, Gerald took out a lighter from his pocket and set the clothes on fire.

All insects were afraid of fire. That was why Gerald had done this.

“Follow me!”

Gerald said to Rey and the girls.

Then, Gerald and the other three marched forward. Gerald kept waving the burning clothes in his hand as he led the way.

As expected, it worked, and the insects didn't dare to get near the four of them and went for the soul hunters instead.

When the man in the cloak saw Gerald's actions, he reacted swiftly and ordered his men to light a torch or some clothes.

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Chapter 1837

Snap!

A crisp breaking sound was heard, and the wooden bridge broke mercilessly!

In an instant, everyone fell into the deep abyss of the canyon.

Shouts, screams, and shrieks were heard in the canyon. The sound echoed in the canyon for a long time before dissipating completely.

At that moment, Gerald and his friends fell directly into the river of the canyon together.

Luckily, the bottom of the canyon was not the ground, but a river. Otherwise, they would have already fallen to their deaths.

Nevertheless, the water of this river was bone-chilling.

Gerald quickly located Juno and the others and got them to the riverside one by one.

Rey was completely unconscious. He seemed to have fainted out of fear.

After a difficult swim, Gerald, Juno, and Yrsa finally managed to drag Rey to the riverbank.

The four lay on the riverbank.

After catching his breath, Gerald immediately reacted.

“Quick! We shouldn’t be resting here. We must leave this place now and find somewhere to make a fire to warm our bodies!”

Gerald reminded Juno and Yrsa.

The water of the river was bone-chilling, so their body temperature would drop drastically. If they delayed it any further, they would get hypothermia, and when that happened, they would truly be in big trouble.

Having said that, Gerald lifted Rey up and left the riverbank with Juno and Yrsa.

The four came to an open area, and Gerald put Rey down.

“You guys wait for me here. I’ll go get some firewood!”

Gerald instructed them and walked into the forest quickly.

Gerald came back after a short while with some firewood.

Then, he made a fire.

“Take off your clothes. We’ll dry the clothes first. We will catch a cold if we keep wearing them!”

Gerald said to Juno and Yrsa.

Juno and Yrsa didn't disagree. They couldn't afford to care so much now. It was more important to stay alive. They wouldn't care if it was embarrassing or not now.

Following Gerald's instruction, the four took off their clothes and dried them by the fire.

Meanwhile, Gerald took out two pieces of clothes from Rey's bag and handed them to Juno and Yrsa.

After all, they were girls. He should take good care of them.

Coincidentally, Gerald felt that Yrsa's body shape was not any worse than Juno's.

But now, Gerald was not in the mood to care about that.

After about half an hour, their clothes were finally dry, so they put them back on.

"What's wrong with Rey?"

Yrsa glanced at Rey and asked Gerald.

"He probably just fainted due to fear. He'll be fine!"

Gerald explained briefly.

Gerald had checked Rey's heartbeat and pulse just now and determined that everything was normal. So, this must mean that he had simply fainted out of fear.

Hearing Gerald's answer, Juno and Yrsa were relieved.

"Gerald, you were right. There really was a problem with the wooden bridge!"

As they were sitting together quietly, Juno said to Gerald with lingering fear.

"It felt strange right from the beginning. Think about it. The most feminine place should not be this easy to find. How could there be a wooden bridge that was so easy to cross in between the canyons?"

Gerald said to the girls.

"Anyway, what the hell were those things just now?! They're so scary!"

Yrsa asked. Her heart was still racing in fear.

Gerald and Juno shook their heads simultaneously. They did not know as well.

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Chapter 1838

"I don't know. Regardless, those insects are surely not that simple. They eat humans. Look how the soul hunters were eaten and turned into white bones in seconds!"

Gerald said in retrospect.

Now that Gerald mentioned it, Juno and the other two got goosebumps instantly.

It couldn't be denied that what they had witnessed just now was indeed very horrifying.

A living human had been turned into a pile of white bones. It was utterly horrific.

Thankfully, they were finally out of danger.

Right then, Rey regained consciousness.

"Rey, you're awake."

Seeing Rey awaken, Gerald looked at him and said.

"Brother Gerald, Miss Zorn, I... Are we dead?"

Rey asked in confusion, looking at Gerald and Juno.

Slap!

When Gerald heard that, he slapped Rey at the back of his head, feeling rather annoyed.

“What the hell are you talking about?! We’re all alive and well! Come to your senses already!”

Gerald glared at Rey and uttered word by word.

From that, Rey had completely sobered up.

“That’s great, Brother Gerald! We’re fine now. That’s so wonderful!”

Once he had come to his senses and knew that he was fine, Rey hugged Gerald tightly as he shouted in excitement.

He had been scared to death as he was falling from such a high place. That was why he had passed out, thinking he was going to die just like that. But now that he knew he was fine, he was overjoyed.

“Can you be more like an adult already? Why are you acting like a little girl when you are actually a grown man? You’re not even as brave as Yrsa!”

Gerald admonished him with an annoyed look on his face.

‘Just look at Juno’s disciple, Yrsa. She was just fine! She didn’t even show the slightest sign of fear and was very calm. On the other hand, look at Rey. The difference between the two was so obvious.’

“Um...”

When Rey was criticized by Gerald, he became embarrassed.

Yrsa and Juno, who were sitting beside them, watched and snickered.

“By the way, Brother Gerald, why did the wooden bridge break?”

Now, Rey looked at Gerald in confusion and asked.

“Because there were too many people on the bridge just now. That’s why the structure of the bridge was weakened. Besides, both ends of the bridge were hit by the stones, and that’s why it broke!”

Gerald explained briefly.

“Either way, we should consider ourselves lucky. If it wasn’t because of that, we would have been trapped on the bridge and ended up becoming insect food!”

Gerald didn’t forget to emphasize that.

Indeed, they had nowhere to escape to at that time.

If the wooden bridge hadn’t broken, Gerald and the other three would have had to face the man-eating insects, and they might have turned into white bones, just like the soul hunters.

“Then, what should we do next?”

Rey continued to ask.

“We’ll rest for a while, and then we will continue our journey. There must be another route to bypass this place!”

Gerald said directly.

Hearing what he had said, Rey and the girls didn’t have any objections. They always followed Gerald’s commands.

After all, they could only be safe when they were with Gerald.

After half an hour of rest, the four of them set off again.

But this time, it was better since they had finally gotten rid of the soul hunters.

That way, there wouldn’t be any obstacles ahead of them.

They wondered what had happened to the man in the cloak and his men.

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Chapter 1839

The four set off again. The path they took was considered easy as it was flat ground, so there was no danger.

The four had walked a very long distance unknowingly. They had passed by two hills and reached another hill.

Seeing that the sky was getting dark, Gerald and his friends found a spot to rest.

Right at that moment, a light caught their attention.

“Brother Gerald, look! There’s a house!”

Rey had sharp eyes, so he saw it right away and shouted at Gerald.

Gerald and the girls looked in the direction. Sure enough, it was a house, and there was smoke coming out of the chimney.

This surprised them very much. They never thought that there would be someone living in the deep forest. It was rather unbelievable.

Without any hesitation, they walked toward the house, which was at the bottom of the valley.

By the time they got there, it was already very dark.

Knock! Knock! Knock!

Gerald stood at the door and knocked on it.

After a while, the wooden door was opened.

When the door opened, an old man appeared in front of them.

“Old man, could you let us spend the night at your place?”

Gerald smiled and asked the old man.

The old man glanced at Gerald and looked at Juno and Yrsa, who were behind Gerald.

Only then did he nod subtly.

“Sure, come in!”

Having said that, Gerald and the other three entered the house with the old man. They didn't forget to close the door properly.

Gerald and the others were very happy. They had been worried that the old man might not have agreed to let them in just now.

Once inside, the four of them walked into the room.

“Have a seat!”

The old man brought out four chairs for them, and they sat down.

“Thank you, old man!”

Gerald smiled and thanked the old man quickly.

Hearing what Gerald had said, the other three quickly thanked the old man as well.

“You must have not eaten yet, right?”

The old man did not bother about their thanks and asked them calmly instead.

Hearing his words, Gerald and his friends nodded in slight embarrassment.

They were indeed very hungry, and they hadn't eaten anything for one whole day.

Later, the old man served them some food and tea.

“There's nothing delicious, just these dishes. You can have them!”

The old man said to them as he served the food on the table.

“It's alright, old man. We're very grateful for the food you're giving us.”

Gerald said immediately.

It was good enough that he was willing to give them food. They wouldn't dare to be picky.

Soon after, they started eating.

As they were so hungry, everything tasted very nice.

After gobbling up the food, they were finally full.

“Buuurp!”

Rey acted like he always did, letting out a long burp when he was full.

“Old man, why do you live here alone?”

Gerald asked the old man.

The old man was working on something as he sat. He seemed to be weaving something with some bamboo.

“I’ve lived here since I was young!”

The old man gave Gerald a simple answer.

“What should we call you, old man?”

Gerald asked.

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Chapter 1840

“Bates.”

The old man simply told them his surname.

“Nice to meet you, Mr. Bates. I’m Gerald Crawford. Thank you for letting us stay here tonight!”

Gerald quickly greeted the old man and expressed his gratitude.

“What are you guys doing here?”

Mr. Bates looked at the four of them and asked.

Gerald and the other three were startled by his question.

“Hehe. Mr. Bates, we came here just for a leisurely trip, but we lost our way.”

Gerald explained to Mr. Bates with a smile.

“Leisure? Young man, you must be taking me for a fool.”

Mr. Bates doubted his words and admonished Gerald.

Now, Gerald and the three were even more surprised. They didn't expect that Mr. Bates would actually know they were hiding something.

"Mr. Bates, why do you..."

Gerald asked, pretending to look at Mr. Bates in doubt.

"Young man, I've lived half of my life. You can't lie to me. You're not here for leisure. You are here to search for the territory of the Phangrottom Clan!"

Subsequently, Mr. Bates stated their purpose of coming here openly.

What?!

Their faces changed immediately, showing great surprise.

"Mr. Bates, how did you figure it out?"

Gerald asked curiously.

Although Mr. Bates knew their purpose for coming here, Gerald did not feel a sense of hostility from him.

“Hehe. This place is not a tourist attraction. People come here for just one thing, and that is to look for the territory of the Phangrottom Clan.”

Mr. Bates told them frankly.

Gerald and his friends were amazed. They never expected that Mr. Bates would be so observant.

“Since you have discovered it, I shall not hide it from you anymore. That’s right. We’re here to look for the territory of the Phangrottom Clan!”

Gerald didn’t hide it any longer and admitted it openly.

It was useless to hide and argue if your secret had already been discovered.

“Young man, the territory of the Phangrottom Clan is not a place anyone can go. I advise you to just go back to your place.”

Mr. Bates kindly reminded them.

They were a little startled when they heard that.

“Why did you say so?”

Gerald asked doubtfully.

“Hehe. There were many people like you coming here to look for the territory of the Phangrottom Clan. But in the end, no one came back alive. So, I’m saying this for your sake. Just leave tomorrow morning.”

Mr. Bates smiled as he reminded them again.

“Mr. Bates, we’re no ordinary people. Besides, we come with a mission to save the world.”

Gerald explained to Mr. Bates.

“Ha! Ha! Ha!”

Hearing Gerald’s words, Mr. Bates burst into laughter, and his laugh was full of mockery.

“Young man, don’t say things like that. Those who came here said that as well. But what was the use of that? They still died here in the end.”

Mr. Bates uttered, totally disregarding what Gerald had said.

From what he had said, it seemed like Mr. Bates had met a lot of people. Moreover, their deaths might be related to him.

This was such a deep, old forest, and he lived here alone. This alone was already very strange and unbelievable.

“Mr. Bates, do you know the location of the territory of the Phangrottom Clan?”

After a pause, Gerald looked at Mr. Bates and asked.

Upon being asked that question, Mr. Bates raised his head and stared at Gerald.

After staring into each other's eyes for a few seconds, Mr. Bates opened his mouth.

"I'm sorry. I don't know where it is!"

Hearing his words, Gerald did not press him further.

However, Gerald could see that Mr. Bates probably knew the location of the territory of the Phangrottom Clan. He just refused to tell them.

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Chapter 1841

"I appreciate the reminder, Mr. Bates, but we still have an important mission to accomplish. Since the sooner we locate the territory of the Phangrottom Clan the better, we'll only be staying the night! We'll leave at dawn!" replied Gerald in a gratuitous tone as he looked at Mr. Bates.

Upon hearing that, Mr. Bates said nothing. Even so, if one paid close attention to his reaction, they would be able to see his face twitching slightly in response...

It was late into the night before Gerald and his party finally decided to sleep. To ensure that they wouldn't get sneak attacked in the night, Gerald suggested that the four of them take turns keeping watch.

After agreeing, Gerald was elected first to stay on guard whereas the others headed to bed.

Thankfully, even after his shift ended and he swapped places with Rey, nothing much really happened throughout the night.

The party of four awoke early the next morning and instantly began packing up. Gerald himself walked over to the door to check on how things were looking outside...

To his surprise, he was immediately greeted by the sight of Mr. Bates standing right in front of their door!

Definitely not expecting to meet Mr. Bates in such a way, the wide-eyed Gerald then stared at the calm-looking man for a while before asking, "...Is... there something I can help you with, Mr. Bates...?"

"Tell me, are you really sure that you want to look for the territory of the Phangrottom Clan? Is there no way to deter you?" asked Mr. Bates in a serious tone.

Upon hearing that, Gerald quickly shook his shock off before nodding and determinedly replying, "Indeed, Mr. Bates. We absolutely must go!"

"...Very well, then. Since you're so adamant, I'll lead you there. However, I must remind you that in the end, everything depends on your fate!" declared Mr. Bates, surprising Gerald once more.

Gerald, for one, hadn't expected Mr. Bates's attitude to change that quickly. After all, the man had been trying his hardest to deter them from looking for the territory of the Phangrottom Clan for most of the night. To think that he was now willing to lead them there!

Still, just as Gerald had thought, Mr. Bates knew where the territory of the Phangrottom Clan was. With that in mind, Gerald was prompted to wonder whether the death of the previous party—that had attempted to locate the place—had anything to do with Mr. Bates...

Regardless, Gerald's train of thought was cut short when he heard Mr. Bates say, "Let's not waste any more time. Hurry and pack up!"

Watching as Mr. Bates then turned around to leave, Gerald himself quickly ordered the rest of his party to hasten their packing.

Shortly after, everyone was ready to leave, and they began following Mr. Bates into the depths of the mountains...

Not a word was uttered throughout the entire journey, so eventually, Gerald took the initiative to break the silence by saying, "So... Why the change of heart, Mr. Bates?"

"Let's just say you're different from that previous party!" replied Mr. Bates in a calm tone.

"...Different in what way, Mr. Bates...?" asked Gerald in a curious tone.

"Hah! The earlier party who came looking for the clan were only interested in robbing the tomb! With how blinded by greed they were, it was pretty much impossible for them to locate the Phangrottom Clan in the first place! Them dying only makes sense!" replied Mr. Bates in a calm tone, almost as though he was unfazed by their deaths...

Growing even more curious now, Gerald then asked, "...How... exactly did they die, Mr. Bates...?"

"Hmm? I killed them of course," replied Mr. Bates.

The second he heard that, Gerald's expression instantly darkened. To think that Mr. Bates would confess to something like this so casually!

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Chapter 1842

“Don’t worry, I won’t harm you. After all, I trust you way more than that previous group!” added Mr. Bates when he saw the drastic change in Gerald’s expression.

Though Mr. Bates said that, Gerald was rightfully still slightly worried. After all, who knew whether the man was telling the truth? Despite his worries, Gerald understood that he still required Mr. Bates’s guidance for now.

With that in mind, he could only choose to act accordingly. The second Gerald found something amiss with Mr. Bates, he would surely deal with the man without mercy...

Following that awkward conversation, the group walked for about another hour before finally arriving at what appeared to be a gigantic Stonehenge lookalike...

Naturally bewildered by the sight of it, Gerald was prompted to ask, “And... this is?”

“This is where the portal that leads to the most feminine place can be opened. After passing through that area, you’ll soon be able to find the territory of the Phangrottom Clan. Mind you, however, that getting past the most feminine place isn’t as simple as you’re probably imagining. A weak mind will easily be overtaken by the many ghosts there, and once that happens, you’ll end up being trapped in there forever!” explained Mr. Bates in an earnest tone.

Upon hearing that, Gerald then took out the map that Old Flint had given him... And after looking at it for a while, there was no doubt about it. As it turned out, they really were at the right place. Mr. Bates hadn’t been fooling them at all.

With that in mind, Gerald then turned to look at Mr. Bates before asking, "...Then... When will the portal open?"

"It'll open in three days. That's the middle of the month, if you're curious as to why. Regardless, take note that the portal will only remain open for three days. If you fail to return before then, you'll be trapped there for life, even when the portal reopens in the future!" replied Mr. Bates in a kind tone.

"...Is there no other way we can enter that place...?" asked Gerald as he looked at Mr. Bates, not wanting to have to wait for three days. After all, he was sure that there were definitely other ways to enter the most feminine place.

Understanding Gerald's motive, Mr. Bates then said, "Patience is a virtue, young man! However... Since it was the heavens that fated our meeting, I suppose I could open the portal in advance. However, note that if I do so, only three of you are allowed to enter. One of you has to stay behind! Also, you can't enter alone either. There needs to be at least two of you, that's just how it is."

Despite that being the case, Gerald looked utterly delighted.

Watching as Gerald turned to face them, Juno was prompted to say, "Why don't you and Rey go, Gerald? I'll stay out here with Yrsa!"

Hearing that, Gerald thought for a moment before asking, "Say... Since you said that only two to three people can enter at a time... Could Rey and I enter first before Juno and Yrsa follow behind? That's technically entering in pairs, no?"

Since Mr. Bates immediately shook his head, Gerald could only sigh. It was worth a shot.

At that moment, Rey cleared his throat before saying, "...On the contrary, I think you should head there with Miss Zorn, Mr. Crawford. I'll stay out here with Yrsa!"

After all, since Juno and Gerald were both trained cultivators, they would be able to look out for each other more efficiently once they were inside.

To his surprise, Juno quickly replied, "No, it's too dangerous for you and Yrsa to stay out here without us. With that in mind, just go along with Gerald. That way, I can protect my disciple as we wait for your return."

"I'll have to agree with Miss Zorn. The two of us are entering, and that's that!" added Gerald, who was also worried that Rey and Yrsa would find themselves in deep trouble—if Gerald and Juno entered together—since neither of them could properly defend themselves.

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Chapter 1843

"...Alright then!" replied Rey with a nod.

Hearing that, Gerald then said, "It's decided then, Mr. Bates. Both of us will be entering, so please open the portal for us in advance!"

Upon hearing that, Mr. Bates said nothing. Instead, he walked over to the largest stone pillar in the middle of the 'Stonehenge' before pulling out a small knife from his sleeve...

After making a small cut in his hand, he placed his bleeding palm onto what appeared to be the symbol of a ghost eye on the pillar... and seconds later, the pillar began shaking as the other surrounding pillars began glowing in hues of blue!

Shortly after, a blue portal appeared before Gerald and his party...

“That’s the portal. Head in now, and remember. Only three days or you’ll never be able to leave!” reminded Mr. Bates as Gerald and Rey nodded.

“Got it! Don’t worry, Mr. Bates! Also, I’ll have to trouble you to take care of the two of them in the meantime. Thanks for everything!” replied Gerald in a determined voice as looked at the man.

After seeing Mr. Botes nod, Gerald and Rey then entered the portal... and the second they made it across, the portal vanished.

The pillars themselves instantly stopped glowing, making it seem as though nothing had ever happened here...

Regardless, after witnessing such a magical scene, both Juno and Yrsa could only gape in awe...

Meanwhile, Gerald and Rey found themselves walking through some kind of tunnel-like passage...

Leaning close, the already terrified Rey grabbed onto Gerald’s clothes while muttering, “P-please remember to protect me well, Mr. Crawford...!”

“...Didn’t you say that you weren’t afraid of ghosts?” grumbled Gerald.

“Well, yeah... I’m not afraid of ghost movies, but this is reality! Who knows when a ghost could pop up?” replied Rey in his slight cowardice.

Things were definitely way scarier when he wasn’t expecting ghosts to only pop up on screen!

Regardless, Gerald remained silent, knowing where Rey was coming from. After all, Rey wasn’t used to dealing with ghosts yet, so it was normal to be frightened. Courage would surely come once the lad got used to it.

Whatever the case was, it was about ten minutes later when they finally got out of the passageway... and they were instantly greeted by the sight of a large stone tablet.

Carved on it were four individual characters that stated, ‘The most feminine place’.

Looking beyond the tablet, the duo was able to see another path that seemed to lead to the centermost area in the most feminine place... That was also supposedly the area where various ghosts and spirits resided...

“The true adventure starts here, Rey. Prepare your mind and please refrain from screaming or shouting when anything happens! Just endure it!” warned Gerald as he looked at Rey.

After all, if Rey’s screaming accidentally disturbed the ghosts’ and spirits’ peace, it would surely spell a world of trouble for them...

“I-I’m ready, Mr. Crawford!” replied Rey after taking a deep breath.

Nodding slightly in response, Gerald then began leading the way into the depths of the most feminine place...

With how gloomy and dark the entire place was, just being here would surely send shivers down the spines of even the bravest of people... Naturally, Gerald and Rey were no exceptions.

If this was how it was going to feel throughout their stay here, it now made sense why Mr. Bates had made it compulsory for at least two people to enter at a time...

Had Gerald chosen to enter alone, he would surely be overpowered by the threatening ghostly aura around him... If that happened, he would essentially end up becoming a full ghost himself, causing him to be trapped in this place forever...

Regardless, after walking past a bridge, the duo soon came across a city of sorts...

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Chapter 1844

The city was known as Phantom City, and it was a city that was made specifically for ghosts and spirits.

From where they stood, Gerald and Rey could see that everything in the city looked ancient... The duo was also able to see several ghostly peddlers—that varied in appearance—scattered all over what appeared to be a market in the city.

Understanding that most of the spirit world was going to look like this, the duo decided to make haste and began walking toward the city's entrance...

However, upon reaching the city's gates, their entry was promptly blocked by a pale-faced man donning a long black robe.

Staring at the two with his blue eyes, the black-robed man declared, "Neither of you belong here. Leave!"

"Before that... Who exactly are you...?" asked Gerald.

"I go by Phanto, and I'm the phantom officer of this place!" introduced Phanto, much to the surprise of Gerald and Rey.

To think that phantom officers existed in the first place! It was almost like they were in some television drama or something!

After a slight pause, Gerald smiled faintly before replying, "We're only passing through this place, and we aren't here to cause trouble, sir. With that in mind, please allow us to pass!"

Since this wasn't his usual territory, Gerald knew that he had to refrain from acting rashly. At the very least, he needed to remain polite.

However, if a similar scene had happened in the real world, Gerald would've already made a move on whoever dared to obstruct his way. As if he would have the time to waste with politeness!

"Look, I need a passing permit to allow you to enter! If you don't have any, don't even dream about entering!" replied Phanto in a stern voice.

“A passing permit? How do we obtain one?” asked Gerald.

Hearing that, Phanto then pointed at a tall tower emitting dark blue lights—that honestly wasn’t all that far away—before explaining, “You can get it by passing a test there. Once you’ve got that done, you’ll receive your passing permit!”

“Thank you for sharing!” replied Gerald as he began walking toward the tower with Rey.

As it turned out, entering the most feminine places really wasn’t going to be as easy as they had anticipated. Since Gerald couldn’t think of any other way to enter and he would very much prefer to resolve this issue without using force, the only way forward was to pass that test... At the very least he wouldn’t end up offending any of the locals.

Regardless, they soon found that the tall tower’s gates had been tightly locked. Even so, they knew that there were individuals inside since the interior constantly glowed in that familiar blue hue...

With that in mind, Gerald was just about to knock on the door when suddenly, it swung open!

Before Gerald could even react, a cold and gloomy-sounding voice could be heard coming from inside, shouting, “Enter!”

Hearing that, Gerald was first to enter. However, just as Rey was about to follow, the gates suddenly slammed shut behind Gerald!

“...H-huh? What’s happening, Mr. Crawford...?” asked the astonished Rey.

“One individual at a time!” yelled the same voice from before.

Understanding that this was simply a rule to this place, the disheartened Rey could only sit on one of the tower’s many steps as he waited for Gerald to return...

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Chapter 1845

Gerald himself soon came across a white-haired person donning a long, grey robe...

“Hmm... I can see that you’re half human and half ghost!” said the robed person as he stared at Gerald from head to toe.

Naturally, this momentarily startled Gerald. To think that this person would be able to tell that easily!

“...And you are...?” asked Gerald.

“I go by Torme, and I’m the phantom emissary in the most feminine place. In simpler terms, I’m responsible for interacting with outsiders. It’s the reason why I was so easily able to discern your origins,” explained Torme.

“...I see. It’s a pleasure to meet you, sir. I go by Gerald Crawford, and just as you’ve said, I’m half human and ghost. However, do note that I’m also a cultivator!” replied Gerald, not feeling the need to hide that fact.

“That would explain why there’s such a massive cocktail of spiritblade and holy spirit within your body... Still, the spiritblade you own is simply astonishing. If this continues on, something will definitely happen to you!” said Torme with only good intentions.

Of course, Gerald knew for a fact that Torme was talking about the Astrabys Sword that he had on him.

Choosing to ignore the topic, Gerald then declared, “...Whatever the case is, I’m here to obtain a passing permit, sir!”

“So it would seem. I’m assuming you’re trying to head to the territory of the Phangrottom Clan, correct?” asked Torme as he stared at the youth.

“Indeed!” replied Gerald with a nod.

“I assume you know that you’ll have to pass a test before you’re able to get the permit?” said Torme as he continued staring at the youth.

“I do. It’s the reason I came here in the first place!” replied Gerald in a determined voice.

“Very well, then. Are you prepared?” asked Torme.

“Ready as ever!” declared Gerald without the slightest hesitation.

The second Gerald’s sentence ended, however, Torme seemingly vanished as Gerald’s surroundings instantly darkened!

While a regular person would've certainly felt that the darkness was overbearing, Gerald was no ordinary person.

Standing calmly on the spot, it wasn't long after before a stone door appeared before Gerald.

"This will lead to the first stage of your test," said Torme from within the darkness.

Hearing that, Gerald then turned the doorknob... and upon opening the door, he was greeted by an astonishing sight.

Before him, was near-endless people killing each other! The fact that the individuals looked like they came from different time periods only served to confuse Gerald even more.

"From the past, till the present, war has never changed... Murder and death are simply interconnected. Regardless, here are three choices. Based on what you're currently seeing, would you choose to let all the villains die? Or perhaps you'd prefer to allow all the good people here to have a chance to get reincarnated. There's also the option of simply allowing fate to decide... Which will it be?" asked Torme's disembodied voice.

Upon hearing that, Gerald began pondering about it.

While the test may have seemed easy, Gerald knew that it was simply a front. After all, how could a test on human nature ever be that simple?

Either way, Gerald knew that all three choices weren't all that bad. The problem was, which was the correct answer? He really didn't want to fail the very first test...

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Chapter 1846

After thinking about it for a while longer, Gerald declared, "...I choose to let fate decide!"

"...Oh? An unexpected answer! Care to explain why?" asked Torme.

"Well, essentially, not one person can truly decide the life or death of themselves or others. In the end, fate is the final decider. If it truly is a person's time to meet their end, then there's simply no stopping it. With that in mind, I have no right to choose the eventual destinies of these people! While it's true that I'd love to have all the despicable villains die, I believe that they'll eventually reap what they've sown! After all, fate will surely grant them suiting ends when the time is right!" explained Gerald.

After saying all that, applause could instantly be heard as Torme said, "Not bad! You're different from the others! Congratulations, you've passed the first test!"

Following that, the darkness disappeared, and everything appeared the way it had previously been. Torme himself hadn't budged from the spot, though he was now smiling as he praised, "As you've said, nobody can truly decide the life and death of themselves or others. I'm glad to hear that you're not the kind of person to mercilessly kill others!"

While Gerald was surprised to know that he had passed the first test so easily, he quickly snapped out of it before politely replying, "I appreciate the compliment, sir!"

"Well said! Regardless, are you ready for your second test?" asked Torme.

“I am!”

Upon saying that, Gerald watched as Torme vanished once more and his surroundings began changing again...

In the end, Gerald was enveloped in darkness again... This time, however, there was a screen with quickly alternating scenes playing on it...

From what Gerald could see, the screen was projecting the experiences of a person from the moment he was born till the day he died...

“What you’re watching is a person’s entire life... Fleeting, isn’t it? Now tell me, what do you think about life?” asked Torme’s disembodied voice.

Hearing that, Gerald turned to look at the screen, wondering if he was now being tested on his understanding of life...

‘What do I think about life...? What even is life...?’ Gerald thought to himself.

After a brief pause, Gerald was prompted to ask, “...Have you experienced life as a human before, sir?”

“I have, though I refuse to experience such a life again!” replied Torme in a slightly remorseful tone that Gerald was immediately able to up.

From what Gerald could assume, Torme must have lived an excruciating life for him not to have another shot at it.

With that, Gerald then closed his eyes tightly as multiple scenes began playing in his mind... The scenes themselves were his own experiences from when he was young up till this very day...

While it was true that as a child, he had it pretty rough, he was now living quite a good life. Wasn't life just a series of joys and sorrows as well as partings and reunions?

It wasn't long after that thought when Gerald reopened his eyes before saying, "...While everyone's lives are different, to me, life is essentially just a cycle that one goes through from the day they are born till they die... The cycle itself is essential so that one gains enough experience to better themselves before they enter the afterlife..."

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Chapter 1847

"Pain, happiness, money, and family... all those are just small parts of life. In the end, what really matters are the choices one makes as they slowly proceed through the cycle of life... While I'm not sure what experiences you've undergone before, I do know that life isn't constantly filled with grief and pain. Enjoyable parts of life definitely exist, and once individuals realize that, they'll surely live better lives instead of constantly complaining about life's injustices..." explained Gerald.

While Gerald hadn't really grasped what the test was about in the beginning, after thinking about all this, he was now sure that he was being tested on how well he understood life.

What more, Gerald had noticed that the scenes playing on screen were simply Torme's experiences when he was still alive. With that in mind, Gerald was sure that the test was also done to help Torme resolve his inner issues.

Whatever the case was, Gerald was now sure that in order to have a good life, one had to experience it to the fullest. In doing so, individuals would be able to go through the most of their grief, joy, partings, and reunions before they eventually passed on...

Regardless, after Gerald stated his answer, Torme reappeared before Gerald again, causing the room to revert to the way it was.

Smiling subtly, Torme then said, "For hundreds of years, I've been waiting for a person to help me resolve all my resentment... Thanks to you, I'm no longer burdened by all this! As you've said, going through cycles is the only way that humans are able to progress! Congratulations, you've passed the second test!"

Hearing that, Gerald couldn't help but feel happy.

"...However, your life is much more different compared to others. After all, at this rate, you're going through way more gains and losses than any average joe could ever experience. With that in mind, I hope you're mentally prepared for the fact that in the end, some of those people will leave you for good..." added Torme.

Upon hearing that, Gerald's heart skipped a beat. From the looks of it, Torme could see Gerald's future...

While he now knew that, Gerald chose not to ask for any details. After all, there was no use knowing about the future. In the end, he was the one in control of his own fate, and he refused to deliberately change it just to alter the future that Torme saw.

Besides, it wasn't as though he was going to be able to alter his future the second Torme told him about it. Every action he made could vastly change his fate, after all.

Whatever the case was, Gerald simply nodded at Torme in response before saying, "Understood, sir!"

"Very good. Now then, let the final test begin!" replied Torme as he waved his hand, causing the scene to shift again...

While Gerald was surprised that Torme didn't even ask him if he was ready this time, he was even more astonished when he suddenly saw a figure slowly approaching him...

Squinting his eyes to get a clearer look at the figure, it wasn't long before the stunned Gerald realized who she was...

It was none other than Juno!

When Juno got close enough, she smiled faintly before calling out, "Gerald!"

Hearing her gentle, familiar voice, Gerald couldn't help but ask, "...Juno... You... Why are you here...?"

"Say... Why don't we stay here forever, Gerald...? Just you and me in the most feminine place... together," replied Juno, completely ignoring Gerald's question.

"...Huh? Stay... here? Of all places? Why would you even suggest such a thing...?" asked the deeply confused Gerald.

"...Hmm? Could it be that you're hesitant about staying here with me...?" replied Juno as her cheery expression instantly turned gloomy.

Before Gerald replied, he suddenly remembered that up till this point, everything that Torme had shown him had merely been illusions. With that in mind, he now knew that this 'Juno' was nothing more than just another illusion!

"...I refuse! After all, everything here is just an illusion!"

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Chapter 1848

After saying that, Gerald stared hard at the fake Juno... and in the end, his immense willpower was able to break the illusions around him!

Watching as everything returned to normal, the surprised Torme could only stare at Gerald. To think this youth would have such powerful willpower...

"...I've yet to meet someone who has willpower as great as yours... You truly are a powerful individual..." praised Torme.

"I appreciate the compliment, sir. Regardless, I assume you were testing me on my willpower?" asked Gerald slightly curiously.

"Indeed, and with how easily you broke the illusion, I'm pleased to say that you passed with flying colors! Your performance up till this point has been well over my expectations!" declared the amazed Torme.

Compared to all the previous others who had taken the test, Gerald was by far the fastest to shatter the illusion... It was incredulous, honestly.

Whatever the case was, Gerald then nodded before asking, "So... that's test three, correct? How many tests are there in total, sir...?"

Realizing that he hadn't told Gerald about that, Torme quickly replied, "There are a total of five tests, so only two remain now. Even so, I hope you don't let your guard down since the final two tests will be the deciding factor on whether or not you get your passing permit! I'll also say it in advance that those two tests are extremely difficult to pass, so you best prepare yourself mentally!"

"Worry not, sir! I'm ready and I'll definitely pass the tests!" replied Gerald confidently.

"Very well, then! Let the fourth test begin!" declared Torme with a nod as he changed the scene once more...

Once everything settled down, all that remained was a table that stood before Gerald... On it was a piece of paper, a pen, and three boxes...

Raising a slight brow, Gerald then walked over to the table to have a closer look...

The second he was close enough, Gerald quickly realized that the names 'Rey', 'Juno', and 'Yrsa' had been written on the three respective boxes...

Before Gerald could wonder what this test was about, Torme's disembodied voice could suddenly be heard saying, "Out of the three names before you, you'll need to choose one of them to die. Mind you, you'll only obtain the key to open the large entrance of the Phangrottom Clan's territory once you make your choice."

Stunned, Gerald could only mutter, "...That..."

Gerald was naturally unwilling to choose any of his dear friends to die. Unsure how to even proceed with this, he was prompted to ask, "...Is this truly the only way I'll be able to obtain the key to open the large entrance of the Phangrottom Clan's territory...?"

"Indeed!" replied Torme without the slightest hesitation.

Upon hearing that, Gerald now realized that Torme wasn't kidding when he said that the final two tests were exceedingly difficult...

"Just so you know, if you fail to choose anyone by the end of all this, you won't be able to obtain that key..." added Torme, clearly taunting Gerald.

Feeling at a loss, Gerald then began pondering on his next step... Until suddenly, he realized that he had a fourth option.

"...Sir, I'd like to choose myself!" declared Gerald as he wrote his own name on the paper without any hesitation...

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Chapter 1849

Just as Gerald was bracing for death to hit him, he stared wide-eyed as his surroundings reverted to how they had previously been.

“Congratulations, Gerald! You’ve passed the fourth test!” declared Torme with a smile as he walked toward Gerald.

Surprised, Gerald couldn’t help but mutter, “I... passed the test...?”

“Indeed, you have!” replied Torme with a nod.

“Then... was self-sacrifice the answer to that test...?” asked the confused Gerald.

“Not really. Rather than testing your willingness to sacrifice yourself, it was a test to see whether you’d choose your desires over your friends’ lives. Now that I’ve seen that you’re clearly one who cares greatly for your comrades, I can safely say that you’ve passed this test!” explained Torme.

After hearing that, Gerald realized that had he chosen any other option, he would’ve surely failed the test! However, the even bigger shock came when Torme added, “Also, had you chosen any of your three friends earlier, they would have died for real! With that in mind, you’ve essentially saved their lives!”

So... If he had chosen any of his friends, they would have perished just like that...? The thought of it alone sent shivers down his spine...

“Regardless, you truly are the kindest and most powerful person I’ve met to date... Now, for the final test... Are you ready?” asked Torme.

Taking a deep breath, Gerald then replied, “Bring it on!”

Nodding in response, Torme then waved his hand... and in the blink of an eye, Gerald found himself standing within a bamboo forest.

Confused, Gerald was prompted to ask, "...And... This is...?"

"The bamboos in this forest are known as soul bamboo. You'll pass the final test if you manage to break a few of them," explained Torme.

Upon hearing that, Gerald couldn't help but raise a brow. After all, bamboo in general was pretty easy to snap.

"Isn't... the fifth test a little too easy...?" asked Gerald in a confident tone.

Chuckling in response, Torme then calmly replied, "Go ahead and do so, then!"

Hearing that, Gerald then stood before a soul bamboo... and after taking in a deep breath, he swung the side of his hand toward the bamboo in one fluid but powerful motion!

Though a loud collision sound was heard due to the immense force Gerald had applied, the soul bamboo barely moved an inch.

Naturally, this stunned Gerald. To think that he would be unable to snap the soul bamboo... No wonder Torme had been so calm!

"Hmm? Didn't you say it was going to be easy...? All jokes aside, do understand that each soul bamboo hosts different meanings. Only after you understand the bamboo's meaning and principles will you be able to break it. In a way, fortune plays a rather large part in this," added Torme as he looked at Gerald with an interested gaze...

Quickly catching onto the hint that Torme had just given him, Gerald then replied, “Then... How should I access the meaning behind this soul bamboo?”

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Chapter 1850

Hearing Gerald’s question, Torme then explained, “You simply need to place your hand on the soul bamboo. Once you do, it’ll transmit its meaning into your mind. However, please remember to use your heart to feel it! Don’t ever be led astray!”

Immediately doing as Torme said, Gerald then placed his hand onto the bamboo... and all of a sudden, the soul bamboo began glowing in a light blue hue!

Gerald watched as the glow slowly enveloped his hand... and a split second later, the youth found himself standing within a white space.

Looking around, Gerald saw that aside from an old man—who was sitting cross-legged on the ground—and a Go board before that man, there was nothing else in this empty dimension...

While he was slightly stunned, Gerald quickly snapped out of it before walking over to the old man...

“Ah, here you are, mister! Come, have a seat!” invited the old man before Gerald could even say a word.

Upon hearing that, Gerald simply did as he was told.

Watching as Gerald sat opposite of him, the old man then said, "Since you're already here, why not play a game with me?"

Nodding in response, Gerald simply replied, "It would be an honor to play with you, sir!"

Smiling, the old man chose not to say anything as he slowly waved his hand... and just like that, the Go board was cleared.

Seeing that, Gerald respectfully said, "After you, sir!"

Still choosing to remain silent, the old man simply grinned as a stone hovered out from the Go bowl and placed itself on the board!

While the magical scene definitely surprised Gerald, he quickly snapped out of it, knowing that it was now his turn.

Taking a black stone out from the Go bowl, Gerald then placed it on the board as well.

While it was true that Gerald had some experience with Go, it wasn't a lot by any means. With that in mind, he wasn't particularly good at the game. Even so, the game was an immersive one, and the duo continued putting stone after stone on the board... until eventually, Gerald's defeat was sealed.

"Try not to get overly impatient or anxious, mister. You have to learn to understand the profound meaning of the game..." said the old man.

Upon hearing that, Gerald could immediately tell that there was some underlying meaning behind those words. If what he had managed to gather was correct, in order to fully grasp the bamboo's meaning, he first needed to understand the game inside out...

With that in mind, the second game soon commenced.

While Gerald was certainly no expert yet, he had improved considerably compared to the first game.

Gerald had realized that he had merely been on the defense throughout the first game. Due to that, he lacked the strength to counterattack at the last moment and was promptly defeated. In Torme's words, he had been 'led astray'.

Regardless, now that he knew where his mistake was, Gerald no longer remained on the defensive. Instead, he launched attack after attack! After a vigorous battle with the old man, however, Gerald still ended up losing.

"You've greatly improved from the last game, mister! Your success is near! I can feel it!" said the man before clearing the board again.

The second the third game began, Gerald took the initiative to attack. He wasn't about to get led astray by the old man anymore. Instead, he was going to be the dominant one this time!

Since his Go game skills had greatly improved by this point, it honestly surprised even Gerald himself that the old man wasn't able to launch any counterattacks.

Either way, after an even more vigorous battle than before, Gerald finally attained victory.

“Congratulations on gaining a complete understanding, mister! You may leave now!” said the old man after losing the game.

Surprised to hear that, Gerald was about to ask something when he realized that the old man and the go board had vanished!

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Chapter 1851

Upon returning to the real world, Gerald was instantly swept by feelings of relaxation as his mind acquired newfound understanding. As it turned out, returning from that white dimension was the final step for him to gain this understanding.

Looking at the soul bamboo before him, Gerald then lifted his hand... and with a swift strike using the side of his hand, he sliced the soul bamboo clean in half!

Pleased to have snapped his first soul bamboo, Gerald was now a hundred percent sure of what the first soul bamboo meant.

Essentially, one couldn't just expect to see instant benefits. Things needed to be done in proper order, and only then would success come... After all, while Gerald did lose the first two Go games, after learning the rules a bit better and observing how things went on the board, step-by-step, he was eventually able to win against that old man.

Regardless, upon seeing that the soul bamboo had been snapped, Tomie—who had been watching over Gerald this entire time—couldn't help but smile as he said, “Congratulations on breaking your first soul bamboo, Gerald!”

Smiling in response, Gerald then headed over to the next soul bamboo before placing his hand on it again. The sooner he got all this done with, the better.

Soon enough, Gerald found himself transported to yet another dimension. Compared to the previous white space, however, Gerald was greeted by the sight of several quickly alternating beautiful scenes...

Shortly after, another old man made his appearance before smiling warmly as he said, "Good day, mister. Tell me... What do you think these scenes symbolize...?"

Surprised by the sudden presence of the old man, Gerald quickly shook his shock off before asking, "...Before that, how should I address you, sir?"

Chuckling in response, the old man replied, "Well, I'm a psychic spirit, so you can call me that if you'd like!"

"I see... It's a pleasure to meet you, sir. Regardless, about your question... I can see that the scenes alternate endlessly among the four seasons. Spring, summer, autumn, and winter..." said Gerald in a respectful tone.

Nodding in response, the psychic spirit then replied, "Well, you're not wrong there. While the scenes do depict the usual seasons, there's another message to be found in all this... Why not try calming yourself to see if your heart can sense it?"

Upon hearing that, Gerald nodded before doing as the psychic spirit had told...

After a while, Gerald realized something and he opened his eyes again before saying, "...I think I understand now, sir. Essentially, not only do the scenes depict the four seasons, but they also symbolize the different experiences one undergoes in life."

“The spring scene displays a sprout which I’m assuming symbolizes the moment one is born. The summer scene, on the other hand, shows how hot it can get.

From what I can gather, it’s a way of saying how hardships and distresses are normal experiences as one grows older.

Moving on to the autumn scene, it depicts the harvest season, which should be when an individual feels the most accomplished they’ve ever felt in their life.

Finally, winter, the period of reminiscing. For me, winter symbolizes the moment when one nears the end of their life cycle...” explained Gerald.

The second his explanation ended, the psychic spirit instantly began clapping as he declared, “Not bad at all, mister! As you’ve said, the four seasons do indeed symbolize a person’s life.

I have to say, you truly are extraordinary to be able to have such a deep understanding of life! You really are different from the others! Regardless, you’ve completed my test so you can leave now!”

And just as before, Gerald’s consciousness was quickly transmitted back to reality...

Upon seeing the second soul bamboo before him again, Gerald immediately repeated the slicing action on it!

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Chapter 1852

As expected, this bamboo broke instantly as well, and by conquering it, Gerald now understood the meaning of life.

Essentially, one's life was like the four seasons since everyone experienced birth, sicknesses, and eventually death. It was simply according to the seasonal cycle. While one would definitely experience other things as well, nobody would truly be able to change their fate in the seasonal cycle of life.

Regardless, Torme himself was now smiling widely after watching Gerald successfully break the second soul bamboo. This youth wasn't disappointing him in the least!

Whatever the case was, Gerald didn't even wait for Torme to say anything before moving on to touch the third soul bamboo.

While Gerald was already used to having his consciousness getting transferred, he still found himself slightly stunned when he realized that standing before him, was a doppelganger!

"...And you are?" asked Gerald.

"Heh! I'm just you!" replied the other Gerald as he revealed a subtle smile.

"What? If you're me, then who am I?" said Gerald.

"You're me, and I'm you. There's nothing technical about that! We're simply the same person! Even so, we're different from the way we view things!" explained the other Gerald.

“...Different views? Elaborate,” replied Gerald.

Chuckling in response, the other Gerald then said, “To put it in layman terms, I’m your dark side! A fancier name would make me your inner demon!”

As it turned out, the lookalike was a manifestation of his inner demons! This must be the third soul bamboo’s test!

With that in mind, Gerald had a hunch that as long as he managed to defeat the demon, he would be able to fully understand this soul bamboo.

“Whatever the case is, you’re an idiot, Gerald. Why the hell didn’t you just pick Rey in exchange for the key to the large entrance of the Phangrottom Clan territory? Picking yourself... You could’ve died you know?” added the other Gerald in a gloomy tone.

Upon hearing that, Gerald stared at his inner demon for a while before retorting, “As if I’d ever use my friends as bargaining chips! I’ll never sacrifice them!”

“You utter buffoon! That Rey? He’s just a prick and you know it! You could’ve easily gotten rid of him for good! How stupid do you have to be for me to spell it out for you?!” scowled the inner demon as he glared at Gerald.

“Shut it! You’re just my inner demon! In the end, I’m the one who decides on what I think!” growled Gerald who was getting fed up with his inner self.

Upon hearing that, the inner demon instantly roared in laughter as everything around them turned pitch black. The scene was nothing short of terrifying...

“Talk big, will you? Look, I can easily just swallow you up, you know? Once that happens, you’ll be beneath me your entire life!” scoffed the inner demon as he smiled wickedly while staring at the youth.

Before Gerald could even reply, his eyes widened as his other self summoned an incredibly familiar-looking sword...

“...The Astrabyss Sword?!” yelled Gerald, feeling slightly stunned that the demon could also wield the legendary weapon.

“Things could have gone much differently, Gerald! But due to how idiotic you are, you only have yourself to blame! I’m vanquishing you for good so that I’ll be the rightful owner of your body and mind!”

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Chapter 1853

After saying that, his inner demon began charging toward Gerald!

Since the inner demon was an exact replica of Gerald, he shared the same strength and capabilities as Gerald. Naturally, Gerald noticed this, and he immediately began retreating as he dodged the onslaught of attacks!

Unfortunately, since their skills were on par, Gerald’s neck ended up getting slightly cut by the sharp blade.

The Astrabyss Sword's tip had merely brushed across Gerald's skin, yet it was already bleeding... Gerald didn't even want to imagine what would happen if the sword struck him for real...

Whatever the case was, he couldn't allow this inner demon to get rid of him. After all, if he lost this battle, he would lose control over his body forever!

With that in mind, once he was at a safe distance, Gerald drew out his own Astrabyss Sword.

"Hah! Thinking of launching a counterattack?" sneered the inner demon.

"You won't have your way! I'm burying you deep in my heart so that you'll never be able to resurface again!" declared Gerald in a righteous tone.

"Let's see if you can win against me first!" yelled the inner demon as both he and Gerald bolted toward each other!

Since both of them were equally fast, their blades met even before a split second passed!

With a massive 'clang' the impact of the two legendary blades caused both of them to take a few steps backward!

"I hope you haven't forgotten that I'm your dark side, Gerald! I don't have anything weighing me down! With that in mind, I'm way stronger than you!" scoffed the inner demon in a smug tone before he immediately began chanting a spell...

Within seconds, Gerald watched as all sorts of knife brandishing ghosts began appearing! The inner demon had summoned them from the Astrabyss Sword to deal with Gerald!

Though the spirits immediately began rushing toward Gerald, the youth remained calm and simply took out the spirits, one by one...

However, no matter how many spirits he slew, more would just appear... That b*stard of an inner demon was simply summoning no end to them!

Laughing maniacally as Gerald got surrounded by yet another group of spirits, the inner demon then smugly proposed, "Gerald, listen. Wouldn't it be great if we just cooperated? With your intellect and my strength, we'd surely be an unstoppable force!"

Naturally, Gerald wasn't going to agree to that anytime soon.

While the inner demon may have thought that Gerald's loss was already determined, Gerald knew that his other self was merely a temporary manifestation of his worst aspects. With that in mind, there was no way Gerald was going to let that nobody surpass him!

As he thought about that, an idea suddenly came to Gerald. Understanding that it was now or never, Gerald immediately began projecting his immense will and psychokinetic powers around him.

The second he started doing so, his inner demon immediately began suffering a severe headache!

Slowly kneeling, the inner demon held on to his aching head as he asked, "You... The hell have you done...?!"

“Remember, you’re just a momentary manifestation of my inner demons. With that in mind, you won’t be able to defeat me in a million years! My true power will always be stronger than yours!” scoffed Gerald as he walked over to his other self and grabbed it by the neck.

Glaring at his inner demon fine final time, Gerald then increased the force of his grip while yelling, “Exterminate!”

And just like that, the inner demon vanished, sending Gerald’s consciousness back to reality...

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Chapter 1854

With that, Gerald successfully made it past his third soul bamboo, and with a swift attack, he instantly split it clean in half!

Walking up to Gerald, Torme then smiled as he said, “Congratulations for defeating your inner demon, Gerald!”

Slightly stunned that Torme knew about his battle, Gerald was prompted to say, “Sir... You... Knew?”

“Indeed. I saw all that happened in each of the soul bamboos. I also know what each soul bamboo here stands for. Regardless, had you failed to defeat your inner demon, you’d have ended up getting swallowed by him.

If that came to be, I’m sure you’re aware that not only would your consciousness get sealed deep within your heart forever, but that inner demon of yours?

He'd take your place! Thankfully, you managed to defeat him! I must say, you haven't disappointed me at all!" declared Torme as he looked at Gerald with a satisfied expression.

Watching as Gerald nodded, Torme then added in a serious tone, "Inner demons are dark manifestations that exist in everyone's hearts. Sadly, not many are actually capable of truly vanquishing them.

While I've come across many people who've attempted to defeat their inner demons, they always ended up getting swallowed by their inner demons, resulting in them becoming their worst nightmares... With that in mind, since you've managed to make it past your demons, I have to say I greatly admire you, Gerald!"

"I appreciate the compliment, sir! Now, if you'll excuse me, I'll proceed with the next soul bamboo!" replied Gerald in a gratuitous tone before walking toward his fourth soul bamboo.

However, before he was able to touch it, Torme suddenly shouted, "Wait!"

Turning around, Gerald raised a slight brow as he asked, "Is... something the matter, sir...?"

"There's no need to go through the fourth soul bamboo. You've passed the test!" replied Torme, astonishing Gerald quite a bit.

Before Gerald could even reply, he watched as Torme waved his hand... and just like that, both of them were back in the tower.

"Have... I really passed everything, sir?" asked the confused Gerald.

“Indeed! You’re the most outstanding cultivator I’ve ever met! With that in mind, you have every right to head to the Phangrottom Clan’s territory! As promised, I’ll also be handing you the key to the large entrance of that territory! While I’m sure you’re on some extraordinary mission, do remember that in the end, whether you’ll be able to obtain what you want ultimately depends on fate...” said Torme.

Gerald himself was currently too pleasantly surprised and excited to feel down by that statement. To think that he had managed to pass the test without needing to fully complete it! Torme was even giving him the key to the large entrance of the Phangrottom Clan’s territory!

The youth’s train of thought was cut short when Torme revealed a rectangular wooden box before handing it to Gerald as he said, “The box contains the key I promised. It’s yours to take now!”

Taking the box, Gerald then slowly opened it... and inside, was an iron key with the Phangrottom Rune on it.

Glad to have finally obtained it, Gerald immediately replied, “Thank you, sir!”

“You’re very welcome, though honestly, you deserve the key. Regardless, a bit of advice before you head off. The Phangrottooms are a spiritual clan that rules over all souls... With that in mind, I’m sure you can imagine that they’re not ones who are easy to persuade. What I’m saying is please make sure that you’re mentally ready to face everything, and that includes quite a bit of pain. It’s not a stretch to claim that your real test will begin once you arrive there!” advised Torme.

“Got it. I’ll keep that in mind!” replied Gerald in a respectful tone.

“I’m sure you will. Now head off! The passing permit is already hanging on your waist!” said Torme as he waved his hand at Gerald.

Upon hearing that, Gerald instantly looked at his waist area... as true to Torme's words, a passing permit was hanging there! When had Torme even done the deed...?

Chapter 1855.

Whatever the case was, Gerald simply nodded before walking out of the tower...

Upon exiting, he saw that Rey was taking a nap with his back leaning against the tower's walls!

Squatting down, Gerald then patted Rey's face a few times while saying, "Hey, I wasn't in for that long... Are you seriously sleeping here?"

Quickly waking up, the shocked Rey couldn't help but exclaim, "A-ah! Mr. Crawford! You're finally out? I've been waiting for ages!"

"...Ages? I'm pretty sure I've been in there for half an hour at most," replied Gerald as he raised a slight brow.

Then again, Rey wasn't one to lie. Could the time in the tower move differently compared to the time in the outside world...? After all, as they said, 'a day in heaven was equivalent to a year in the human world'. With that in mind, who's to say that the tower didn't function following those rules? While it wasn't completely out of the question, it still seemed rather magical to Gerald.

"...Regardless, I've managed to obtain the passing permit, so let's go!" added Gerald, not wanting to bother about something that trivial. After all, the more crucial thing to do now was to enter the Phantom City...

Soon after, the duo arrived at the city's gates again, and upon showing the passing permit to the phantom officer, they were finally granted access into the place...

"...Say... What exactly did you have to do to obtain the passing permit, Mr. Crawford...?" asked Rey in a curious tone.

"Let's just say I had to go through some tests of life," replied Gerald, knowing that his answer was the truth despite how vague it sounded.

As Gerald recalled all the principles and experiences of life that he had been tested on back in the tower, he couldn't help but feel pleased that after all that, he managed to obtain the key to the large entrance of the Phangrottom Clan's territory as well.

Whatever the case was, Rey naturally didn't know what Gerald was going on about, prompting him to say, "...Huh? Come again...?"

Shaking his head, Gerald then leaned closer to Rey before whispering, "Forget about that for the moment. I actually have some good news to share! See, I've managed to obtain the key to the large entrance of the Phangrottom Clan's territory!"

Upon hearing the good news, Rey immediately grew excited as he exclaimed, "Really?"

"Hush! Aren't you worried at all that others may learn of this?" replied Gerald as he glared at Rey while gesturing for him to keep it down.

Upon hearing that, Rey instantly calmed down, making sure to cover a hand over his mouth to ensure no further noise came out from him...

After walking for a while longer, the duo came across a town within Phantom City. While it looked no different from human settlements, the ghosts here had their own lifestyles that were evidently different compared to how humans lived.

As the duo watched hordes of ghosts wandering along the streets of the town, it wasn't long before a few phantom soldiers—riding phantom horses—encircled Gerald and Rey!

"Both of you, come with us!" ordered one of the soldiers in a frigid tone.

