

Chapter 1684

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.

Chapter 1685

“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.

Chapter 1686

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.

Chapter 1687

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!”

Chapter 1688

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.

Chapter 1689

“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.

Chapter 1691

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...?’

Chapter 1692

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!

Chapter 1693

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.

Chapter 1694

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.

Chapter 1697

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!

Chapter 1698

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...

Chapter 1699

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 Hulkeric 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...