

Strongest

Chapter 1551 – God’s Blood

Inside Zero Wing’s resplendent Guild Hall...

As soon as Youlan and the others entered the building, they were captivated by the scene before them.

From the outside, Zero Wing’s Guild Hall was no larger than the Guild Halls in superpowers’ headquarters. Upon entering the building, however, it felt as if they had stepped into an entirely different world. No matter how they looked at it, Zero Wing’s Guild Hall was bigger on the inside.

The first-floor lobby was already the size of a football field. Quite a few Guild members rested in the lobby and conversed, while several players queued up at the front desk to rent Private Rooms. A quest hall, which was even larger than the central room, was located beside the lobby. Many Guild members occupied the quest hall as they searched for suitable quests to pick up. Specifications for high-rank individual quests and high-rank team quests were displayed in rotation on the large screens hanging from the ceiling, with a stupefying number of available quests[1].

This is a 3-star Guild Residence? Youlan smiled bitterly when she saw the quest hall’s large screens.

Underworld had desperately tried to increase its Guild Popularity, yet despite its effort, its best Guild Residence only provided five to six hundred high-ranked individual quests and 100 or so high-rank team quests per day. With such small numbers, not even Underworld’s core members were guaranteed to receive a high-rank quest every day.

In contrast, Zero Wing was flooded with high-rank quests. Currently, there were over 2,200 individual quests and 400 team quests available. With so many, even the Guild’s elite members had an opportunity to pick up a high-rank quest.

Unlike ordinary Guild Quests, which usually awarded Coins, EXP, and GCPs, players had a chance of obtaining rare items from high-ranking quests. Moreover, these quests offered a much higher monetary reward. Players could also help increase the Guild's Popularity.

If Zero Wing had such a large supply of high-rank quests, it could develop more Guild members. In the long run, the gap between Zero Wing's members and players in other Guilds would grow.

"This is where you'll complete the registration procedures. You just need to register here, and you'll become Zero Wing members," Shi Feng explained as he led Youlan's group to the Guild's registration counter. "As for your rank, you'll all start out as normal members. You will then have to accumulate a certain amount of GCPs and pass the appropriate tests to rise through the Guild's ranks. However, since I invited you personally, we can forgo the required number of GCPs. We'll determine your ranks based solely on your performances in the test.

"To become an elite member in Zero Wing, you'll have to reach the early stage of the Trial Tower's fifth floor. As for becoming a core member, you'll have to reach the sixth floor's middle stage."

Youlan and her companions gasped after listening to Shi Feng's requirements.

To ordinary players, a player would be an expert if they could reach the Trial Tower's fourth floor. If a player could reach the fifth floor, they'd be publicly acknowledged as an expert, yet Zero Wing required players to reach the fifth floor to become elite members. The requirement to become a core member was even more terrifying, actually requiring players to reach the sixth floor's middle stage...

Even first-rate Guilds' main force members would barely qualify to become Zero Wing's core members. Guilds handpicked these experts from their core members, yet this was the minimum requirement to become a core member in Zero Wing...

Youlan and the others felt beads of sweat slide down their skin from the embarrassment.

Among the dozen or so experts in their group, only Youlan and Dark Eye met the requirements. The rest of their group was slightly weaker, with the best among them having only reached the fifth floor's late stage.

"Guild Leader Black Flame, what about Lifestyle players?" the dozen or so Lifestyle player behind Youlan asked nervously.

They were Lifestyle players. Although some Lifestyle players were acceptable fighters, these players weren't.

"Relax. There's a separate test for Lifestyle players that join the Guild. But that test is conducted at the Candlelight Trading Firm," Shi Feng explained.

The dozen or so Lifestyle players breathed a sigh of relief. They were Advanced Lifestyle players that Youlan had nurtured. While they weren't good in combat, they were top-notch when it came to subclass standards.

However, they nearly choked when they heard Shi Feng's next words.

"For subclasses, those who have reached the Advanced rank will become Candlelight's official members. To become a core member, you have to achieve a practical success rate of 30% with Advanced items."

In God's Domain, Advanced subclasses only had around a 35% theoretical success rate with Advanced Items. The practical percentage, however, was much lower. The majority of Youlan's Advanced Lifestyle players only had a practical success rate of 25%. Raising their success rates by even 1% would require refining their technique standards quite a bit, much less a 5% increase.

Even Youlan was surprised.

She felt that this requirement was a little too excessive.

She was no stranger to subclasses. After all, she had been supervising the Underworld's trading firms for some time. She had a relatively clear understanding of the present state of God's Domain's subclasses. The dozen or so Lifestyle players who had followed her could rank among the top Lifestyle players in Underworld in terms of production standards. They were only slightly weaker than the organization's top-ranked Lifestyle players, yet in Zero Wing, they didn't even meet the requirement to become core members...

"Right, we just so happen to be running a performance assessment for alchemists today. If there are any alchemists among you that wish to participate, I'll take you there in a bit. If you rank among the top 10, you'll be promoted to a core member. If you rank high enough, you might even get to use a set of Dark-Gold alchemy tools for a certain period. The Chief Alchemist will also have the authority to use a Basic Meditation Room long-term. These benefits will definitely help you reach Master rank. You'll also be able to visit Titan City," Shi Feng said.

When the group's Lifestyle players heard this, a fiery passion ignited in their eyes. Unfortunately, few of them were alchemists. Otherwise, they would definitely compete in this assessment.

In response, a white-haired elder stepped away from the group. He smiled at Shi Feng and said, "This is interesting. May this old man participate as well?"

“Master Aspiration is going to participate” Youlan gave the old man a confused look.

Silent Aspiration was very famous in the virtual gaming world. While he had resided in Star-Moon Kingdom, he had created the Fire Dragon Potion despite being an Intermediate Alchemist. The Fire Dragon Potion had allowed Overwhelming Smile to compete with the Candlelight Trading Firm. Silent Aspiration had long since become an Advanced Alchemist and was only a step away from Master rank.

Silent Aspiration wasn't normally interested in competing against others, yet this old man had actually asked to participate in this competition. His initiative had truly surprised Youlan.

“Mhm. Although Zero Wing has offered us shelter, we can't let them look down on us,” Silent Aspiration whispered to Youlan as he nodded.

“Of course. Once we've completed the test here, we'll head over to the Candlelight Trading Firm,” Shi Feng said as he looked at Silent Aspiration. He knew a little about this man, but although the man hadn't been particularly famous during God's domain's early stages, practically everyone had known his name after ten years. He had been a Master Alchemist and only a step away from becoming a Grandmaster.

More importantly, he had created the Master ranked potion that even Grandmaster Alchemists admired—God's Blood!

God's Blood was why Silent Aspiration had become famous throughout God's Domain. It had been an incredibly powerful Master ranked berserk potion. In addition, God's Blood could stack with a Berserk Skill without side effects.

Even Super Guilds had offered astronomical prices to purchase the God's Blood recipe. Unfortunately, due to Silent Aspiration's strange nature, he had only sold one recipe in the past. Moreover, he only accepted alchemy tools and materials as payment. The various Super Guilds had competed over the recipe like madmen.

After Youlan and the others revealed their system results for the Trial Tower, Shi Feng led Youlan, Silent Aspiration, and the other Lifestyle players to the Candlelight Trading Firm. As for Dark Eye and the other experts, Shi Feng sent them to join the 100-man expert team under Shadow Sword and Turtledove's leadership to grind for equipment in Level 45, 100-man Hell Mode Team Dungeons.

Ten minutes later, Shi Feng's group arrived before the Candlelight Trading Firm.

The Candlelight Trading Firm was housed in a much taller building than Zero Wing's Guild Hall. One could say that it was the tallest player-owned Shop in White River City. Since the teleportation fees between countries had fallen, an unprecedented number of Lifestyle players visited the Candlelight Trading Firm. The establishment's prosperity could now rival Star-Moon City's Auction House.

After reaching the trading firm, Youlan and her companions discovered a large number of Lifestyle players seeking to join Candlelight. Dozens of Advanced Lifestyle players had lined up to register for the trading firm's test. This had never happened in Underworld's trading firms...

Chapter 1552 – Candlelight's Foundations

After arriving at the Candlelight Trading Firm, Shi Feng led Youlan and the others into the building.

Entering the trading firm's first-floor hall was like entering a supermarket. All kinds of products had been set up for sale in the hall.

When players from other cities and kingdoms saw the trading firm's interior, they felt as if they had just set foot in another world.

Unlike the other Guilds, Shi Feng had placed heavy importance on Lifestyle classes since the beginning of the game. As a result, the Candlelight Trading Firm had plenty of Lifestyle players. This, in turn, allowed the Candlelight Trading Firm to produce a variety of items in large quantities.

Currently, the Candlelight Trading Firm sold over a hundred different kinds of crafted items. Although most of these items weren't particularly high-quality and they didn't have much practical use, they still attracted customers to visit the firm.

Unlike other trading firms, Candlelight also sold high-ranked weapons and equipment. Aside from the Level 45 Dark-Gold Equipment, which was clearly a display and had astronomical price tags, there was plenty of pieces of Level 5 to 40 crafted equipment up for sale. The quality of these pieces ranged from Bronze to Fine-Gold rank. This even allowed the trading firm to satisfy players that had only joined God's Domain recently.

Meanwhile, players constantly crowded the counter selling crafted Level 40 weapons and equipment.

Although there was quite a bit of Level 40 weapons and equipment on the market, items of Secret-Silver and Fine-Gold rank were still fairly rare. Guilds and teams usually kept these items for their own use. Even when they chose to sell these items, they usually set the price far above market value.

However, the Candlelight Trading Firm was different. It consistently produced Level 40 equipment ranging from Bronze to Fine-Gold rank, most of which was Secret-Silver and Fine-Gold rank. Moreover, the trading firm sold the equipment it produced at fair prices. Although the prices were slightly higher than market value, they weren't ridiculous. As a result, players usually bought out any Level 40 Secret-Silver and Fine-Gold Equipment very quickly.

“As expected of the publicly-acknowledged, number one trading firm in Star-Moon Kingdom. Its foundations are really something.” Silent Aspiration nodded in satisfaction as he looked through the various products on display.

Youlan’s other Lifestyle players were shocked.

Shi Feng’s group quickly reached one of the Special Alchemy Rooms on the Candlelight Trading Firm’s top floor. A large crowd had already gathered in the room, and when Shi Feng’s group entered, everyone turned towards them.

“Huh? The Guild Leader is here to watch the ranking competition?”

“The Guild Leader is visiting us personally? Could he have some good news?”

“There should be. Didn’t you hear that Zero Wing City’s construction has completed? He might be looking for people to manage the Candlelight Trading Firm there. After all, Manager Melancholic can’t handle so many locations by herself.”

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Upon seeing Shi Feng enter the room, the crowd launched into a quiet discussion about his visit. Their excitement about the competition also grew.

“Guild Leader, you’re here. I’ve arranged everything to your specifications. There are a total of 323 alchemists participating in the test this time. Among them, 244 are Intermediate Alchemists, and 79 are

Advanced Alchemists. We can start the competition once you're ready," Melancholic Smile reported after approaching Shi Feng.

Youlan and her companions, who stood behind Shi Feng, gasped.

The Candlelight Trading Firm has so many Advanced Alchemists? Youlan was astonished as she surveyed the crowd before her.

When she had first entered the room and saw this crowd, she had assumed that every one of Candlelight's alchemists was present, the firm housing roughly the same number of alchemists as Underworld.

However, the difference was far larger than she had thought. This firm already had over 300 Intermediate Alchemists. If they included Basic Alchemists and Apprentice Alchemists, shouldn't Candlelight have nearly 1,000 alchemists under its command?

The number of Advanced Alchemists Candlelight possessed was simply horrifying.

Underworld currently had nearly 20 Advanced Alchemists, yet the Candlelight Trading Firm had over four times that...

Hearing this, Silent Aspiration's fighting spirit welled within him.

"Alright. I have another alchemist here who wishes to participate in the ranking competition. With this, we'll have 80 Advanced Alchemists form a group, while the Intermediate Alchemists will form their own." Shi Feng nodded. He wasn't surprised in the least by the number of Advanced Alchemists current in the Candlelight Trading Firm.

With Zero Wing's current popularity and the benefits Candlelight offered, it was natural that the trading firm attracted so many Advanced Alchemists.

In reality, the trading firm could've had even more Advanced Alchemists, but due to God's Domain's evolution changing the subclasses, it had become significantly harder for players to upgrade their subclasses. In the past, Lifestyle players had simply needed to fulfill the Proficiency requirement to be promoted. Now, however, not only did Lifestyle players had to have enough Proficiency, but they also had to pass a test at their respective Lifestyle Associations. Once they could create a specified item with a certain success rate would their rank rise.

Otherwise, with how many alchemists the Candlelight Trading Firm nurtured, they would've had far more Advanced Alchemists.

Following which, Silent Aspiration joined the competition group for Advanced Alchemists.

"Right, for this ranking competition, aside from the aforementioned benefits, the top three players will have the opportunity to learn this Mana Enhancing Potion Recipe," Shi Feng said as he took a large booklet from his bag and placed it on the stone table before him. He then shared the details of the Mana Enhancing Potion to everyone in the room.

When the crowd finished reading the potion's effects, they went into an uproar.

"What?! This is a berserk potion!?"

“An Advanced Berserk Potion? And there’s a special alchemy technique included with the recipe! If I could learn that technique, I might have an easier time trying for Master rank. I have to fight for one of the top three positions this time, no matter what!”

Every alchemist’s eyes shown with excitement. Even Silent Aspiration, who didn’t seem overly excited about the competition, showed great interest after seeing the Mana Enhancing Potion.

Advanced Alchemy Recipes weren’t like ordinary alchemy recipes. Advanced Alchemy Recipes required the application of unique alchemy techniques. If one could learn these techniques, they’d have better luck when creating their own unique potions in the future. For alchemists who dedicated themselves to researching berserk potions, learning the alchemy technique for the Mana Enhancing Potion was necessary.

“Wonder, this is your chance. Haven’t you been trying to create an Advanced Berserk Potion for your Master rank promotion for a while? If you can get your hands on this recipe, you’ll definitely get promoted,” a female alchemist beside Silent Wonder said.

“Mhm. This recipe will be of great help. If I secure first place and get the Green Jade Set as well, I’m confident that it won’t be long before I become a Master Alchemist.” Silent Wonder nodded. When she looked at the Mana Enhancing Potion Recipe on the table, she knew that she had to obtain it. Moreover, she had the confidence and qualifications to do so. After all, she had constantly improved her techniques for a while now.

Seeing fighting spirit fill both Silent Aspiration and Silent Wonder, Shi Feng chuckled.

“Now that I’ve said everything that needs to be said, you may head to your designated Alchemy Rooms. The results will be determined based on overall success rate and production speed,” Shi Feng said. “No outside items may be used during this competition. You may only use the materials and tools provided by the Guild.”

None of the alchemists were surprised by Shi Feng's requirements.

A few of the Intermediate Alchemists might have better technical skills than the Advanced Alchemists, but due to their late start in the game, they might not have reached the necessary Proficiency to become Advanced Alchemists yet. Hence, by having Intermediate Alchemists produce Intermediate items and Advanced Alchemists produce Advanced items, calculating the results based on overall success rate and production speed, the firm could assess the players' technical skills, creating a fair competition between the two ranks.

Following which, Melancholic directed everyone to their designated Alchemy Rooms.

"Guild Leader, is this really alright?" Melancholic Smile worriedly asked after seeing watching the alchemists enter their assigned rooms.

To attract alchemists to join the Candlelight Trading Firm, they had advertised that even the firm's official members would have the right to compete for the Dark-Gold alchemy tools. Although their advertisement had succeeded, letting these non-internal members use such valuable tools was a huge waste. If they only gave internal members access to these tools, they might nurture Master Alchemists far more quickly.

Instead of answering Melancholic Smile's question, Shi Feng asked, "How are the internal members doing? What's their progress on learning the Basic Secret Alchemy Technique?"

"One-third of them have learned the designated Basic Alchemy Technique. According to the rules you've set, each technique they learn will grant them one chance to read the Moon God's Secret Record. So far, the best alchemist has read the Moon God's Secret Record four times, while everyone else has read it twice on average," Melancholic Smile answered, unsure as to why Shi Feng had asked such a question.

Although the Basic Alchemy Techniques were beneficial, they were only basic techniques at the end of the day. Meanwhile, there was no lack of experts among the alchemists participating in this

competition. This was especially true for Silent Wonder. Had the woman chosen to become one of Candlelight's internal members, she might've become a Master Alchemist by now.

"That's enough, then." Shi Feng chuckled without explaining further. "Now, all we need to do is examine their performance."

The benefits he had offered were astounding, but that didn't mean that outsiders could easily gain access to them.

Chapter 1553 – Alchemy Battle

Despite the confident look Shi Feng gave her, Melancholic Smile couldn't help her concern. However, since Shi Feng had decided, she could only watch this competition play out and hope that the non-internal members wouldn't occupy too many of the top-ten positions.

Letting internal members learn Basic Alchemy Techniques? When Youlan overheard the conversation between Shi Feng and Melancholic Smile, she could not help her smile.

She had worried for Silent Aspiration since he'd be competing against so many Advanced Alchemists.

Now, however, she breathed a sigh of relief.

If it were only a matter of Basic Alchemy Techniques, Silent Aspiration had already learned a few. Although Basic Alchemy Techniques were indeed precious, with her position in Underworld and the resources she had collected, she had managed to help Silent Aspiration learn three such techniques.

Moreover, Basic Alchemy Techniques could only help alchemists solidify their foundation. It wouldn't help them much when improving their actual technique standards past a certain point. When comparing technical standards, there was little difference between an alchemist who had learned three Basic Alchemy Techniques and one that had learned four. The difference would only show itself when players attempted to create their own unique potions.

With the Basic Alchemy Techniques Silent Aspiration had learned and the wealth of experience he had gained while dabbling in the alchemical arts, he should have a high chance of securing first place in this competition. With this, she could, more or less, prove to Zero Wing that her group could be useful. Otherwise, in the event that the Blackwater Corporation targeted Zero Wing because of her people, Zero Wing's members would look down on her group.

Meanwhile, in the Alchemy Rooms on the top floor, both the Advanced Alchemists and the Intermediate Alchemists had begun to refine the materials on their respective workstations.

For the competition, every alchemist had been given 100 sets of materials. Moreover, rather than some extremely valuable potion, they only had to create commonly used potions.

The Intermediate Alchemists had been asked to create Fire Potions. As for Advanced Alchemists, they had to create Frozen Soul Potions.

Although the Fire Potion and the Frozen Soul Potion were common items, their production was more difficult than other portions of the same rank. They were quite suited for testing alchemists' production techniques.

Shi Feng had also chosen these two potions for the assessment due to the Eclipse Gate. Any player that visited the Eclipse Gate would need them. The Frozen Soul Potion, in particular, could grant a small amount of Ice Resistance and waken freezing. These effects were particularly useful when fighting the Eclipse Gate's ice-type monsters.

“It seems there is some level of difficulty to this assessment.” Taking a look at the materials before him, Silent Aspiration realized that he had to craft an Advanced Potion.

Once the alchemists were in position, Melancholic Smile announced the competition’s start through the team chat.

The alchemists took action immediately.

They are all quite skillful! Shi Feng nodded in satisfaction while he watched the display showing the Advanced Alchemists’ competition venue.

Every Advanced Alchemist had clearly come prepared. As soon as the competition had begun, they had entered a state of total concentration, ignoring everything around them as they focused on concocting their potions. Their actions were fast and precise, without any excess movement to waste their time.

Not only were these alchemists required to maintain a high success rate in this competition, but they also had to maintain a high production speed. With only one hour, it was impossible for the alchemists to go through all 100 sets of prepared materials. The main goal was to see how many potions the alchemists could produce within a fixed time and at what success rate. This way, the outcome would be obvious for all to see when the competition ended.

“Master Aspiration is really impressive. He refined the materials so quickly,” an Advanced Alchemist behind Youlan exclaimed as he watched Silent Aspiration’s performance.

Although he, too, was an Advanced Alchemist, his rank had been average among Underworld's Advanced Alchemists. In a competition between 80 Advanced Alchemists, he had little confidence of ranking among the top 10. However, Silent Aspiration was different. Even in Underworld, only one other Advanced Alchemist had been capable of competing against Silent Aspiration. That alchemist had also been an elder with decades of alchemical experience.

Meanwhile, Silent Aspiration's refining process was meticulous and natural. The Frozen Soul Potion's production had very high requirements. If the refined materials weren't sufficiently pure, the system would determine the potion's failure, yet Silent Aspiration refined the materials nearly twice as fast as the other Advanced Alchemists in the competition and still fulfilled the system's requirements...

Just where did the Guild Leader find this alchemy expert? His production speed is actually on par with Silent Wonder's. Silent Aspiration's performance even surprised Melancholic Smile.

Silent Wonder was one of the Candlelight Trading Firm's top Advanced Alchemists. She'd even rank near the very top of all of God's Domain's alchemists. Melancholic Smile envied the woman's talent. Fortunately, she was a forger, but an alchemist.

Yet, Shi Feng had actually found another Advanced Alchemist that could rival Silent Wonder.

When Melancholic Smile thought about how the Candlelight Trading Firm had two such impressive individuals, she became even more confident of competing in the Apocalypse Empire and the Black Dragon Empire.

Even the Candlelight Trading Firm's alchemy is so strong? Meanwhile, Youlan couldn't help but be astonished by Silent Wonder's performance.

The Candlelight Trading Firm had risen to fame due to its forging standards. It was likely that no power in Star-Moon Kingdom could surpass Candlelight in forging. Even throughout God's Domain,

Candlelight's forging standards would rank at the very top. After all, based on the information she had collected in Underworld, she knew that the firm had at least one Master Forger—Black Flame.

Master Lifestyle players stood at the apex of God's Domain's current subclasses. Based on the reports she had received, there were only three players that had been confirmed as Master Forgers in God's Domain, including Black Flame. Moreover, among these three people, one had only been promoted recently.

She had never expected the Candlelight Trading Firm to be so impressive in alchemy as well. Furthermore, Silent Wonder was still so young...

Although Youlan herself was not an alchemist, she could still tell that, aside from Silent Wonder, the other Advanced Alchemists' standards were very high. If the Candlelight Trading Firm continued to grow at this pace, it would definitely become a powerful force not to be reckoned with in the future.

Time passed quickly. The Intermediate and Advanced Alchemists in the Alchemy Rooms entered their own worlds as they focused on creating their respective potions. Before they knew it, the one-hour time limit ended.

As an ear-piercing alarm rang in the Alchemy Rooms, every alchemist stopped what they were doing.

"Time's up?"

"Please let me get into the top ten this time!"

Some alchemists in the competition venues worried as they reluctantly parted with the partially concocted potions in their hands. Some players confidently set their tools down and waited for the supervisors to tally their scores.

“Alright, everyone enter the venues and tally up the crafted potions and used materials. Once you’re done, send the results to me directly,” Melancholic Smile instructed the NPCs outside the Alchemy Rooms’ entrances.

In God’s Domain, as a Shop’s star-rank rose, the intellect of the Shop’s NPCs would increase as well. These NPCs could then help players with a larger variety of tasks. However, this improvement came with a price as the Shop would have to pay higher salaries. Fortunately, the increased expenditure was no problem for the Candlelight Trading Firm.

Following which, the NPCs entered their assigned Alchemy Rooms and collected every alchemist’s results. They then transmitted the information to Melancholic Smile.

A short moment later, Melancholic Smile had the results for the 244 Intermediate Alchemists and 80 Advanced Alchemists. Immediately, Melancholic Smile had the system filter the information, and she quickly obtained the competition’s final ranks.

At the same time, the various alchemists left their respective Alchemy Rooms and regrouped in the Special Alchemy Room Shi Feng occupied. After entering the room, they watched Shi Feng and Melancholic Smile with hopeful expressions.

“I wonder who will rank among the top ten this time?”

“I’ll definitely be one of them! My performance was exceptional this time!”

“I wonder who will get number one?”

“It should be Silent Wonder. She’s been improving like there’s no tomorrow. I’ve heard that she has already invented a new Advanced Berserk Potion. Only, she hasn’t successfully crafted the potion thus far.”

Everyone was curious and confident about the competition this time, and they couldn’t help but chat quietly as they waited.

“Alright, quiet down. I’ll announce the results now,” Melancholic Smile declared.

Chapter 1554 – Hierarchical Gap

In the crowded Special Alchemy Room, every player turned towards Melancholic Smile as soon as she spoke, eager to learn the competition’s results.

Any alchemist would even envy the benefits for the tenth place, let alone the benefits the top three would enjoy.

With the help of the awarded alchemy tools, these alchemists would have a smoother path to becoming Master Alchemists. Once they became Master Alchemists, they’d reach the apex of the alchemy industry, becoming a target for superpowers’ recruitment.

“A total of 324 people have participated in the competition this time. Among them, 244 are Intermediate Alchemists, and 80 are Advanced Alchemists. Overall, I would say that everyone has scored

fairly well. However, the final results are clear," Melancholic Smile said, smiling as she glanced at the alchemists present. "I'll now announce the top ten rankings.

"Tenth place: Floating Cloud, Intermediate Alchemist. Materials used: 59 sets. Produced 19 Fire Potions. Practical success rate is 32.2%."

"Ninth place: Smiling Heaven, Advanced Alchemist. Materials used: 49 sets. Produced 16 Frozen Soul Potions. Practical success rate is 32.65%."

"Eighth place: Tainted Maple, Intermediate Alchemist. Materials used: 58 sets. Produced 19 Fire Potions. Practical success rate is 32.75%."

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As Melancholic Smile reported the results, the crowd gasped in shock.

"What?! Even Intermediate Alchemists have ranked among the top ten?!"

"Crap! What kind of speed and success rate is that?! I went all-out for the whole hour, yet I only used 52 sets of materials and made 16 Fire Potions. Are they even human?"

All of these alchemists were very familiar with the Fire Potion and Frozen Soul Potion's production specifications. If an alchemist of the same rank tried to craft them without the aid of any external items, the system would set their base success rate at 35%. However, it was extremely difficult for an alchemist's practical success rate to reach this theoretical success rate. If an alchemist only crafted a small number of potions, they might be lucky enough to achieve a practical success rate that was higher

than the theoretical success rate, but that was nearly impossible when mass-producing potions. Moreover, the likelihood of such a situation would only decrease as players crafted more potions.

Hence, when competing in a competition that required 50 to 100 sets of materials, one had to rely on their actual capabilities. Luck had very little impact in such competitions.

Moreover, it was extremely difficult to maintain a high production speed if one wanted to maintain a high success rate. After all, the hastier one was, the more likely they were to make mistakes. This, in turn, resulted in a lower success rate.

In this competition, players were first judged based on the number of potions they crafted. Their success rate was secondary. If two players produced the same number of potions, their ranks would then be determined by their success rate. This made it impossible for players to gain an advantage with trickery. Of course, this judging method was only effective among alchemists of the same rank.

At the end of the day, the Fire Potion was much easier to produce compared to the Frozen Soul Potion. It didn't require as much time to craft, either. As a result, it was natural that the players crafting Fire Potions would produce more than those crafting Frozen Soul Potions. Hence, when comparing alchemists of different ranks, for fairness's sake, Advanced Alchemists would have a modifier of +3 potions added to their tallies.

Just who are these people? Youlan was astounded as she watched the alchemists walk up to the stage Melancholic Smile occupied.

When Shi Feng had stated that the practical success rate of Candlelight's core members was around 30%, she had assumed the man had exaggerated. Looking at it now, however, it would seem that Shi Feng had told her the truth. In fact, he had understated the firm's alchemists.

There were likely only two alchemists in Underworld who could achieve such a high production speed and success rate. Ordinary Advanced Alchemists would be fortunate to achieve two-thirds of the production speed of Zero Wing's Advanced Alchemists. They'd thank the heavens if they could reach even 20% of these alchemists' practical success rate.

As Melancholic Smile continued to announce the top-ten ranks, Silent Aspiration and Silent Wonder, who stood below the stage, were flabbergasted. They had never thought that the other alchemists in the trading firm would achieve such excellent results, only slightly inferior to theirs.

Zero Wing sure has a lot of alchemy experts. But this old man will still take first place. Silent Aspiration hadn't lost any of his confidence. He had nearly achieved perfection with his performance.

While he was surprised that so many of Candlelight's Advanced Alchemists had produced 16 Frozen Soul Potions in one hour, they still couldn't compare to him. After all, he had crafted a total of 18 Frozen Soul Potions. Though part of the reason for his result had been his luck with his final attempt, luck was also a component of an alchemist's strength.

"Alright, next up is fifth place: Silent Aspiration, Advanced Alchemist. Materials used: 53 sets. Produced 18 Frozen Soul Potions. Practical success rate is 33.96%!"

Everyone gasped when they heard Silent Aspiration's results.

The Advanced Alchemist that scored sixth place had only produced 16 Frozen Soul Potions, yet his score had increased by two. The result was frightening.

Fifth?! How is this possible? Silent Aspiration turned to look at Melancholic Smile, suspicious.

Even Youlan, who stood beside Shi Feng, could not believe this.

Silent Aspiration had successfully crafted 18 Frozen Soul Potions in one hour, yet he only ranked fifth.

However, before Silent Aspiration and Youlan could question the results, Melancholic Smile announced the fourth place winner.

“Fourth place: Silent Wonder, Advanced Alchemist. Materials used: 52 sets. Produced 18 Frozen Soul Potions. Practical success rate is 34.61%!”

Hearing this result, Silent Aspiration, who had intended to question the results, was at a loss for words.

Someone was actually capable of producing 18 Frozen Soul Potions with a near-perfect success rate.

“Next, in third place: Rain Walker, Advanced Alchemist. Materials used: 59 sets. Produced 20 Frozen Soul Potions. Practical success rate is 33.89%!”

“Second place: Gentle Stab, Advanced Alchemist. Materials used: 61 sets. Produced 21 Frozen Soul Potions. Practical success rate is 34.42%!”

“First place: Dormant Twilight, Advanced Alchemist. Materials used: 62 sets. Produced 22 Frozen Soul Potions. Practical success rate is 35.48%.”

When Melancholic Smile finished announcing the competition's results, silence descended on the venue. Everyone turned towards the top three alchemists on the stage, skepticism filling their eyes.

Were the results manipulated? Silent Wonder was confused as she read the results.

Her production speed in this competition had been the best she had ever achieved, completing 52 attempts in one hour. That was basically one attempt every minute or so. Her success rate was even close to perfection.

Yet, of the three alchemists who ranked above her, two had spent less than a minute on each attempt. One had even achieved a success rate that exceeded the system's theoretical success rate. She found it hard to imagine how these people could have possibly achieved such results.

The only possibility she could think of was that they had cheated and used alchemy tools that increased their production speed and success rate.

Silent Wonder wasn't the only one with such thoughts. Silent Aspiration and Youlan had reached the same conclusion.

The report had even surprised Melancholic Smile.

"I know that some of you will refuse to believe these results and suspect that the top three alchemists have cheated in some way. However, I guarantee you that that is not the case. This is their own strength. Do not think that the top three positions of the Candlelight Trading Firm are so easy to obtain. If you do not work hard, the gap between you will only grow," Shi Feng stated as he glanced at everyone present. "To maintain fairness, I'll show you these top three alchemists' refining process."

After Shi Feng said so, Melancholic Smile displayed the recording of the top three alchemists' refining process on the magic water ball in the center of the room.

As this was a competition, everyone's work had been recorded to avoid any cheating. Others would also be able to use the recordings of the high-achievers as reference.

As the videos played, the crowd noticed that the top three alchemists' production speeds weren't particularly fast. In fact, they were slower than most of the participating Advanced Alchemists. However, while these three were refining their potions, they'd occasionally give up halfway through and concoct a new potion as if they knew that their attempt wouldn't succeed...

By giving up halfway, these three alchemists saved a lot of time. As a result, they went through far more materials during the limited amount of time.

When the videos ended, every alchemist in the room turned as one towards the top three alchemists, realizing where the difference lay.

How is that possible? Silent Wonder and Silent Aspiration were dumbfounded.

It was impossible to know how a potion would turn out before it was refined. They couldn't fathom why these three had decided to give up on certain attempts midway, yet it was precisely the reason they had achieved far better results.

Could this be some kind of alchemy technique? Silent Wonder and Silent Aspiration considered the thought at practically the same time. This was especially true for Silent Wonder.

She was no stranger to the top three alchemists, but when it came to alchemy standards, she had no doubt that she was superior. The only way the trio could surpass her was with alchemy techniques. The trio must've learned a technique that she didn't know, which was why there was such a massive difference between them. Based on the fact that all three alchemists had learned the same technique at the same time, she guessed that it must have something to do with the Candlelight's internal member training program.

"Alright, now that you've seen their refining processes, I'm sure you've realized where the difference lies. The promised benefits for the top ten winners will be delivered to your respective Alchemy Rooms. I want you three to stay behind. Everyone else, you may leave if you have nothing else to say," Shi Feng announced, chuckling as he noticed Silent Wonder and Silent Aspiration, who appeared to be deep in thought.

Chapter 1555 – Internal Benefits

After Shi Feng gave the command, everyone began orderly shuffling out of the Special Alchemy Room.

Even now, though, everyone still felt a little shocked by the outcome of this competition. Originally, they all thought that Silent Wonder would be the champion this time. They had never imagined that she would actually end up failing to get within even the top three. Moreover, there was a huge difference between her results and the results of the third place winner. This was simply incredible.

However, just like Shi Feng had said, they had indeed underestimated the Candlelight Trading Firm's foundations.

The difference between the support received by internal members and official members was much greater than they had expected.

Only now did everyone understand why Shi Feng had declared that even official members could take part in this competition.

Most likely, from the very beginning, Shi Feng had never once thought that the official members of Candlelight had the capabilities to compete for the top few positions. Hence, he had boldly allowed official members to take part in the competition without any restrictions.

Although the benefits for the top ten positions were quite good, there was a qualitative difference between them and what the top three winners received.

In God's Domain, Secret-Silver alchemy tools were indeed very rare, but the various large Guilds generally had a few pieces. However, in the case of the Fine-Gold ranked Ocean's Glow Set and the Dark-Gold ranked Green Jade Set, they were not things that just any Guild would have. Even Super Guilds would not necessarily be able to obtain these precious treasures.

With the aid of these top-tier alchemy tools, one would definitely have a much higher chance of creating a new potion.

Meanwhile, as everyone was leaving, Silent Wonder suddenly walked up to Shi Feng.

"What's going on? Could Silent Wonder be trying to complain about the competition results?"

"That shouldn't be the case. She must've seen the videos as well. There are indeed no problems with the results. Dormant Twilight and the others did indeed win the competition fair and square. Moreover, the results will most likely remain the same for the next few competitions."

“It really makes you wonder how they managed to improve so quickly. I recall that Dormant Twilight and the other two were quite inferior to Silent Wonder some time ago.”

“How should I know? However, it should have something to do with the trading firm’s internal member training program. It’s a pity that I lack the strength to join it.”

Everyone could not help but start a quiet discussion among themselves as they looked at Silent Wonder.

“Guild Leader, may I ask you a question?” Silent Wonder asked as she looked at Shi Feng seriously.

“A question?” Upon seeing the serious expression on Silent Wonder’s face, Shi Feng chuckled and replied, “Sure, ask away.”

After taking in a deep breath, Silent Wonder said, “I wish to ask about the alchemy technique Dormant and the others have learned. Can the technique be learned by becoming an internal member of the Guild?”

“To some extent, yes,” Shi Feng replied after giving the matter some thought.

Truthfully, Shi Feng was rather surprised himself by the trio’s performance. He had never thought that they would gain such a significant harvest from reading the Moon God’s Secret Journal.

The Moon God’s Secret Journal was indeed an alchemy treasure. However, it was a set of three volumes, and he had obtained only the first volume of the set, which contained only information on the various materials available in God’s Domain. It was just like an encyclopedia for materials. There were no alchemy techniques recorded inside the volume.

Meanwhile, among the Basic Alchemy Techniques he obtained from the Moon God's Secret Room, none of them contained the technique Dormant Twilight and the others had used.

Shi Feng's answer rendered everyone speechless.

What did he mean by "to a certain extent"? Could they, or could they not learn the alchemy technique?

"Then, as long as I become an internal member of Candlelight, will I be able to learn the techniques Dormant and the others are learning as well?"

Silent Wonder simply could not wrap her mind around the technique Dormant Twilight and the others had displayed during the competition. Their every action during the competition had been very normal—so much so that they did not even apply any Basic Alchemy Techniques and had just concocted the potions normally. In the end, however, the results they achieved were still leaps and bounds ahead of hers.

At this moment, it was as if she had seen a new world in Dormant Twilight and the others.

To an alchemy fanatic like herself, it would be akin to torture for her not to study such a mysterious and amazing technique.

"Guild Leader Black Flame, if this old man also becomes an internal member of Candlelight, will I be able to study such alchemy techniques too?" Silent Aspiration, who had kept his own counsel all this time, suddenly stepped forward and asked Shi Feng.

“Master Aspiration?” Youlan could not help being stunned by this scene.

Even back when Silent Aspiration was in Underworld, he had not yielded even once to its temptations. Nothing that Underworld tried succeeded in binding Silent Aspiration to the organization, as the old man despised being bound by restrictions. Yet, now, Silent Aspiration was actually thinking of accepting such restrictive conditions just for some alchemy techniques.

Youlan truly could not help but wonder just what kind of alchemy techniques could actually inspire an obsession in a master like Silent Aspiration.

“I cannot guarantee that you all will learn the alchemy technique you speak of. I can only say that how much you learn after becoming Candlelight’s internal members will depend on yourselves.”

Shi Feng could see the yearning these two people had for alchemy techniques. However, he truly could not guarantee that they would learn the technique they mentioned. It depended entirely on how much they could learn from the Moon God’s Secret Journal and how well they would be able to put that knowledge to use.

Upon hearing Shi Feng’s reply, Silent Wonder and Silent Aspiration could not help but hesitate.

“Since that is the case...I’ll join!” After giving the matter some more thought, Silent Wonder still chose to become an internal member of Candlelight in the end.

Although she did not know what kind of treatment internal members received, when she saw how much Dormant Twilight and the others had improved, she could not help growing anxious. After all, despite so little time having passed since the trio had become internal members, their alchemy standards had already gone from being inferior to hers to surpassing hers by a large margin.

She also had to admit that the Candlelight Trading Firm was truly powerful. It possessed advantages that even Super Guilds did not. Although she was confident in herself, she was not blind.

If things continued at this rate, the gap between herself and Dormant Twilight and the others would most likely continue to widen. This was not an outcome she wished to see.

Moreover, she was also very curious to find out just what kind of item could help the internal members improve by so much in so little time.

“Interesting. This old man will join as well.” Silent Aspiration chuckled as he sent glance at Silent Wonder and Dormant Twilight’s group.

Although being able to conduct experiments without restrictions was good, the competition with a bunch of alchemy experts had rekindled his long-lost fighting spirit and edge.

Now, his goal had already changed. Instead of aiming to become the number one alchemist in God’s Domain, he decided he would first secure the position of Chief Alchemist in the Candlelight Trading Firm. Only afterwards would he contend for the title of “Number One Alchemist” in God’s Domain.

As expected of the Guild Leader. With this, we won’t have to worry about lacking potions to sell in Candlelight. Melancholic Smile could not help but inwardly worship Shi Feng’s capabilities. After all, he had actually managed to lure alchemy experts like Silent Wonder and Silent Aspiration into becoming internal members of Candlelight while barely doing anything.

With the standards of these two alchemy experts, the Candlelight Trading Firm would have no trouble producing extremely complex potions.

Meanwhile, Youlan was dumbfounded by this scene.

Despite all the methods Underworld had tried, it had failed to rope Silent Aspiration into the organization. Meanwhile, Zero Wing had merely allowed Silent Aspiration to take part in a competition, and already the master was taking the initiative to join the Guild.

If Underworld's upper echelon were to find out about this matter, just what kind of reactions would this elicit?

After Silent Wonder and Silent Aspiration declared their intention to become internal members, the other Advanced Alchemists that were still on the fence about binding themselves further to Candlelight decide to join as well.

The Candlelight Trading Firm's capabilities in the alchemy industry soared once again.

Following which, Shi Feng had Melancholic Smile redo the contracts of Silent Wonder and the others as well as give them a rundown on the benefits internal members enjoyed.

Compared to official members, internal members not only enjoyed better benefits but also received more GCPs for the same amount of work. At the same time, they also got to learn rare alchemy recipes. Meanwhile, what surprised Silent Wonder and Silent Aspiration was that internal members could learn not only Basic Secret Alchemy Techniques but also Advanced Secret Alchemy Techniques. However, both types required one to spend a certain amount of GCPs to learn. They were not things that could be learned freely.

"Aside from these basic benefits, there is still this item serving as the main benefit for internal members," Melancholic Smile said as she took out a thick book from her bag and placed it on the stone

table before her. “As long as you all manage to grasp a Basic Secret Alchemy Technique, you’ll gain one opportunity to read this book. If you learn an Advanced Secret Alchemy Technique, you’ll gain five chances to read it.”

The new internal members present stirred slightly when they saw the thick book on the stone table.

However, Melancholic Smile’s words shocked them. Basic Secret Alchemy Techniques were not easy to learn, yet fully grasping one such technique granted them only one opportunity to read the thick book. This requirement was absurdly high.

However, the alchemists that had already become internal members gave longing looks at the thick book, wishing they could read it for the rest of their lives.

“Wait... This book is...the Moon God’s Secret Journal!”

At this moment, Silent Wonder and Silent Aspiration both gaped in shock involuntarily when they read the words written on the cover of the thick book, their breathing becoming much heavier.

Chapter 1556 – 3-star NPC Merchant

“The Moon God’s Secret Journal!”

Everyone present was stunned momentarily when they heard Silent Wonder’s words, their eyes staring dazedly at the thick book on the stone table.

As long as one was an alchemist in God's Domain, they would generally have visited a library and read up on matters regarding the alchemy world.

Most of the many introductory books on alchemy would mention the alchemy treasure known as the Moon God's Secret Journal.

Among the numerous epic wars that the continent of God's Domain experienced before, quite a few of them were over the Moon God's Secret Journal.

Meanwhile, such a precious alchemy treasure was actually being offered as a benefit for the internal members of the Candlelight Trading Firm.

No wonder the three of them could improve so quickly. Realization dawned upon Silent Wonder as she turned to look at Dormant Twilight and the others.

At the same time, the benefits offered to Candlelight's internal members also rendered her utterly speechless.

Shi Feng's confidence in allowing even official members to compete for the top ten positions was understandable.

Meanwhile, Silent Aspiration's eyes were practically glowing as he looked at the Moon God's Secret Journal. He wished he could take a read through the book right this instant.

“I’m sure you all know how valuable this Moon God’s Secret Journal is. If you wish to read it, you’ll have to rely on your own abilities to do so. Any internal member can look for Melancholic Smile to learn Basic Secret Alchemy Techniques. Also, only after learning one technique completely will you be allowed to learn another. Each time you finish learning a technique, you’ll be given one opportunity to read through the Moon God’s Secret Journal. How many times you’ll be able to read through the journal will depend on yourselves.” Shi Feng could not help but chuckle when he saw the longing in everyone’s eyes. He then left the remaining matters for Melancholic Smile to deal with.

Upon hearing Shi Feng’s words, the Advanced Alchemists that had become internal members just now immediately ran up to Melancholic Smile, fighting over the chance to start learning a Basic Secret Alchemy Technique as soon as possible.

Had Shi Feng taken out the Moon God’s Secret Journal and shown it to them before the competition, they would have treated the journal as merely an alchemy treasure. They would not have had a clear understanding of its value. However, after watching Dormant Twilight and the others’ performance, they came to fully appreciate the power of the Moon God’s Secret Journal. Now, they hoped to grasp the knowledge stored inside the journal as soon as possible.

Just as Shi Feng was letting Dormant Twilight and the other two top three winners learn the Mana Enhancing Potion Recipe, Aqua Rose suddenly contacted him.

“Guild Leader, I just received a report stating that Heaven’s Burial has begun raiding the Orc Empire’s Ancient Rock City. Moreover, they’ve mobilized a considerable force. At this point in time, we estimate that Heaven’s Burial has mobilized over 100,000 elite members and 5,000 NPCs. By the looks of it, they are almost certain to capture Ancient Rock City,” Aqua Rose reported.

They dare raid an Orc city with just 100,000 elite players and 5,000 mercenaries? Hearing Aqua Rose’s words, Shi Feng could not help but fall into deep thought. Could Heaven’s Burial have some other insurance?

He might not have a clear idea of how powerful the cities in the Orc Empire were, but one thing he did know was that the cities located in neutral maps were not that easy to raid.

For example, even though the Secret Pavilion had obtained 15,000 NPC mercenaries from him, its chances of securing an Orc city were minimal.

After all, a city possessed a defensive magic array. Meanwhile, attacks at Tier 3 and below would do very little to deplete the energy of a city's defensive magic array. In addition, the Orcs defending the city would definitely outnumber players by a lot. There were also Mythic monsters garrisoning the city.

Unlike the Mythic monsters found in Dungeons and out in the fields, a Mythic monster defending a city would receive a significant buff from the city's defensive magic array. An army of 100,000 elite players was no different from a bunch of ants in the face of such a Mythic monster. The latter could annihilate the former with little to no effort.

In fact, even if the Mythic monsters defending the city did not make a move, the Orc army stationed inside the city would most likely be able to annihilate Heaven's Burial's army of 100,000 elite players easily.

Hence, by attempting to capture Ancient Rock City, either Heaven's Burial's upper echelon consisted of utter fools or the Guild had some other power they were relying on.

"Guild Leader, I heard that many first-rate Guilds are sending their own forces to take advantage of the situation. Should we poke our hands into the matter as well?" Aqua Rose did not have any positive feelings about Heaven's Burial. In other words, their two Guilds were basically enemies. Now that Heaven's Burial was trying to capture Ancient Rock City, Zero Wing naturally could not just sit out and do nothing.

"Forget it. Since Heaven's Burial dares to take such an action, I'm sure they've considered this problem as well. For all we know, we might end up stepping into a trap they set up. Let the other Guilds have

their fun. However, make sure to keep an eye on the situation there as well,” Shi Feng said, shaking his head. “Right, are you done sorting through the information on the NPC merchants yet?”

Beast Emperor’s shadow loomed behind Heaven’s Burial. In a field battle without the aid of defensive structures like the Magic Tower, dealing with a swarm of Evil Beasts and Evil Demons would be very difficult. At the very least, Zero Wing currently still lacked the means to contend against an army of monsters in a frontal confrontation.

In fact, Heaven’s Burial’s goal in attacking Ancient Rock City might not be the conquest of the city at all. It might very well be an attempt to lure the various large Guilds into a trap and turn their members into resources for Beast Emperor to create even more Evil Demons. After all, the Black Dragon Empire’s Evil God’s Temple had already been activated. If Beast Emperor wished to nurture powerful Evil Demons, he would need a large number of sacrifices to do so. Meanwhile, hunting for players the normal way would take a very long time. If he could gather a large number of players in a single location at the same time, with the said location even being in a neutral map... Just the thought of it horrified Shi Feng.

Now, the only thing Shi Feng could do was improve Zero Wing’s power as quickly as possible. He was confident that so long as he developed Zero Wing City properly, be it Heaven’s Burial, Beast Emperor, or the Blackwater Corporation, none of them should even dream of shaking Zero Wing’s foundations by even the slightest.

“I understand. I’ll have Flying Shadow and the others head over to take a look.” Aqua Rose nodded. “As for the NPC merchants, I’ve already compiled a report on their details. I’ll send it over to you now.”

Following which, Aqua Rose disconnected the call and sent the statistics report on the NPC merchants to Shi Feng.

Why are there so many of them?! Shi Feng was stunned as he looked through the information Aqua Rose sent to him.

During the short amount of time Zero Wing City had been open, over a thousand NPC merchants had actually come seeking to do business in the city. This number exceeded even that of the NPC merchants Shadow had managed to lure in with its main city.

Although the majority of the merchants had low potential and were only 1-star NPC Merchants, there were still over two hundred 2-star NPC Merchants seeking to do business in Zero Wing City. With this amount of 2-star NPC Merchants, Zero Wing City could already rival the main cities operated by first-rate Guilds in the past.

These are...3-star NPC Merchants?! As Shi Feng reached the end of the list, he noticed that the symbol representing the NPC merchants had transitioned from two stars to three stars. How is this possible? Zero Wing City was just constructed recently, yet 3-star NPC Merchants are visiting it already?

If the Guilds in the past were to find out that 3-star NPC Merchants visited Zero Wing City almost immediately after the city's opening, they would definitely die of envy.

In God's Domain, there was a qualitative difference between 2-star and 3-star NPC Merchants. Although there was not much of a difference when it came to the kinds of products both types of NPC merchants sold, when it came to potential, a 3-star NPC Merchant surpassed their 2-star counterparts by leaps and bounds.

An NPC merchant's star-ranking determined not only the quality of the items they sold but also the development speed of the Shop purchased by the said NPC merchant.

Shops operated by NPC merchants were different from those operated by players. Players had to either complete extremely difficult team quests or obtain the corresponding Promotion Orders. In contrast, NPC merchants did not have to go through such troublesome procedures. Instead, the promotion of their Shops relied entirely on their sales volume.

After a Shop achieved a certain sales volume, the Shop would get promoted automatically. Meanwhile, the higher-ranked an NPC merchant was, the greater the sales volume they were able to achieve, allowing them to get their Shops promoted much more quickly. When an NPC-operated Shop got promoted, it would start selling much more valuable items—which, in turn, would help attract more players to the city the Shop was located in.

Meanwhile, on average, the promotion speed of a Shop operated by a 3-star NPC Merchant was double that of a 2-star NPC Merchant. If a city possessed a sufficiently large player population, the promotion speed could even be two or three times faster.

Hence, the various large Guilds in the past would do everything they could to attract a 3-star NPC Merchant to their cities.

In the past, Shi Feng had only ever heard of 3-star NPC Merchants taking the initiative to visit the main cities operated by Super Guilds—and never for cities of lower standards. As a result, the large Guilds had to compete over the 3-star NPC Merchants found in the various major NPC cities or wandering out in the fields.

Meanwhile, not just one 3-star NPC Merchant was seeking to do business in Zero Wing City right now, but two instead.

Thinking up to this point, Shi Feng immediately contacted Aqua Rose.

“Aqua, think of a way to have these two NPC merchants stay in the city. I’ll head over immediately.”

In God’s Domain, NPC merchants would stay for only a certain period of time when visiting a city. They would not remain in the city permanently unless given a positive response to their request to do

business. If he were to let these two 3-star NPC Merchants get away now, the next one would be long in coming.

After saying so, Shi Feng called upon Youlan and had her teleport to Zero Wing City's Guild Residence with him.

Chapter 1557 – Empire Changes

Orc Empire, Ancient Rock City:

Although Ancient Rock City had once been an abandoned city, the city had recovered to its former glory after the Orcs returned to manage it. Towering, twenty-meter-high walls surrounded the city. Magic runes also strengthened the walls. Not even players with extremely high Agility would be able to climb them.

A large number of Orcs also patrolled the walls, and a defensive magic array encased the city and its stone barrier. With such tight defenses, not even a fly should think of sneaking into the city.

However, over 100,000 elite players had gathered a short distance away from Ancient Rock City. These players stood at attention in orderly formations, ready to move out at a single command. Every one of these players wore Heaven's Burial's Guild Emblem, and even the lowest among them was Level 40.

A legion of several thousand players atop warhorses stood near the head of this elite army. Even from afar, one would feel an intense pressure weigh down on them.

Aside from Heaven's Burial's members, rows of NPC mercenaries stood among the army's frontline. The weakest of these NPCs was Level 60, Tier 1, while the strongest were Level 70, Tier 2 NPCs.

"Just what are Heaven's Burial's people trying to do? Do they really think they can get past Ancient Rock City's defenses with so little strength?" The various large Guilds' upper echelons watching from the sidelines were confused as Heaven's Burial geared up to attack the Orc city.

Although the Orcs in Ancient Rock City were not particularly high-leveled, with the majority averaging around Level 65, and the highest at Level 72, players would still have a disadvantage with the level difference. Furthermore, the city's Orcs greatly outnumbered Heaven's Burial's forces. Ancient Rock City should be home to over 700,000 Orcs at least. Among them, there was no lack of Great Lords and Grand Lords.

Heaven's Burial's 100,000-strong elite army and 5,000 NPC mercenaries would barely serve as a warm-up for the Orcs.

...

"Guild Leader Singular, it seems our siege has attracted quite a few flies," Lei Jingyang commented, smiling as he surveyed the spectating large Guilds.

Over ten Guilds had gathered to watch Heaven's Burial siege Ancient Rock City. Together, these Guilds had dispatched over 200,000 players. The combined force already surpassed Heaven's Burial's numbers.

If these large Guilds ambushed their army at a crucial moment during the siege, they would deal a fatal blow.

“Isn’t this just as we expected?” Singular Burial asked, laughing.

“That’s right. Though, it’s a pity that Zero Wing isn’t here. Otherwise, we could band together and take the Guild out,” Lei Jingyang said, sighing.

“Alright, it’s almost time to take action. It’s about time we teach these Guilds who rules over this neutral map!” Singular Burial coldly announced after glancing at the system clock.

“Guild Leader, leave it to me! With these sacrifices, we’ll have a guarantee of capturing Ancient Rock City!” Flame Blood said as he took a black crystal ball from his bag. He then began to chant an incantation.

Suddenly, violent roaring filled the surrounding forest. Even the various large Guilds watching from outside the forest clearly heard the monsters.

Suddenly, ferocious monsters with sharp fangs and claws surged out of the forest and charged for the various Guilds’ armies.

“Evil Beasts!”

The upper echelons paled when they saw the monster tide sweep towards them.

They were no strangers to Evil Beasts. After all, they had all watched as Evil Beasts had assaulted Stone Forest Town twice. During the two sieges, they had learned just how powerful Evil Beasts were.

The Evil Beasts charging towards them were all Level 45 and above. Although they were not as strong as those that had attacked Stone Forest Town, they were powerful nonetheless. Furthermore, three Level 60 Mythic ranked Evil Earth Dragons led the Evil Beast army.

“Crap! Everyone, use your Return Scrolls!”

The various Guilds’ upper echelons gave the command to retreat the moment they saw the Evil Beasts. However, when they tried using their Return Scrolls, they found them ineffective. In the end, they could only watch as the Evil Beasts stormed closer.

“Damn it! We’ve been tricked! Everyone, get ready to fight and pull back!”

“How dare Heaven’s Burial do this?! Aren’t they afraid that our Guilds will band together to exact our revenge!?”

Only now did the various large Guilds realize that this had been a trap, but all they could do was give the command to retreat from the battlefield. If they fought the Evil Beasts, they would only suffer even greater losses.

Although these Guilds had a total of 200,000 members with them, the Evil Beast army, which was not suppressed by any magic arrays, had an overwhelming advantage.

Even as the various large Guilds bombarded the Evil Beast army with large-scale destruction Spells, all they accomplished was clearing out the Elite and Special Elite ranked Evil Beasts. The Chieftain rank and above Evil Beasts took barely any damage.

In contrast, the Evil Beasts wiped out these players...

The Grand Lord ranked Evil Beasts easily massacred groups of players as they moved through their enemies' lines. Even when top-tier experts tried to pin these Grand Lords down, their efforts accomplished very little. As for the Mythic ranked Evil Earth Dragons, they were no different than walking disasters. A single hit could take the lives of hundreds of players. When the three Evil Earth Dragons working together, they were practically unstoppable as they mowed through the player armies.

In the end, these Guilds' upper echelons could only watch as their Guild members were exterminated.

"Heaven's Burial, our Guilds will not let you get away with this!" The upper echelons realized that there was no escape. They glared and shouted at Singular Burial's group.

"Let us get away with this?" Singular Burial could not help but laugh. "It seems like you still don't understand your situation! Haven't you realized that the moment you arrived here, you became a stepping stone for Heaven's Burial? From now on, the Orc Empire will become Heaven's Burial's domain! Whatever we say, goes!"

Previously, they hadn't dared to massacre players openly because they had been afraid of the various large Guilds targeting them. However, they had since solidified their foundations. With over 200,000 elite players as sacrifices, they could grow their Evil Beast army to new heights. Once Ancient Rock City became Heaven's Burial's base of operations, not even God's Domain's superpowers would be a threat to their Guild.

As the large Guilds' members continued to die, Flame Blood used the dead players to create Evil Beasts and Demons. Moreover, as the Evil Beasts killed the enemy players, their levels rapidly rose. By the time the various large Guilds were annihilated, five more Grand Lord ranked Evil Beasts had evolved into

Mythic ranked Evil Earth Dragons. The army had also doubled its number of Grand Lords on the battlefield.

“Amazing! As expected of the large Guilds’ elite players! With these Evil Beasts, we’ll have no problems taking down Ancient Rock City!” Flame Blood laughed madly as he gazed at the army under his command.

Without a moment to rest, Flame Blood commanded his Evil Beast army to charge for Ancient Rock City. At the same time, the eight Evil Earth Dragons roared as they launched eight Tier 4 Spells at the city’s defensive magic array. When the Spells collided with the barrier, the barrier shook violently. It was clear that the attacks had depleted a significant portion of the magic barrier’s energy.

...

Meanwhile, back in Star-Moon Kingdom, Shi Feng and Youlan arrived in Zero Wing City’s Guild Residence.

So, this is the rumored Zero Wing City? As Youlan observed the city below her from the Guild Hall’s roof, the scenery captivated her.

Not only was Zero Wing City’s environment impressive, but a vitality that couldn’t be found in any town filled the streets. She spotted plenty of high-level NPCs wandering about the city. There were even plenty of wandering merchants hawking their wares from the sidewalks. Horse carriages, which towns lacked, drove down the streets as they worked. There was barely any difference between Zero Wing City and an NPC city.

If she really had to point out a difference, though, it would definitely be Zero Wing City’s Mana density.

Despite the lack of Magic Towers inside the city, the Mana density here was only slightly weaker than in Stone Forest Town. When considering how spacious Zero Wing City was, Youlan's eyes could not help but light up as she imagined the difference several Magic Towers would make.

With Zero Wing's incredible potential, it was no wonder why Shi Feng even dared to provoke the Blackwater Corporation.

However, Youlan was curious about why Shi Feng had led her here.

"Let's visit the City Lord's Mansion."

Chapter 1558 – 3-star Merchant

The City Lord's Mansion in Zero Wing City was located in the heart of the city. Though, the building resembled more of a mountain, rather than a mansion. Tall walls surrounded the mansion. The structure was also further protected by a powerful magic array, which only allowed entry through the front entrance.

Level 50, Tier 2 NPC guards were stationed the City Lord's Mansion's entrance. The mansion's magic array also reinforced these NPC guards' strength. At this stage of the game, it wouldn't matter how many players tried to break into the City Lord's Mansion; these NPC guards would slaughter every one of them without fail.

When Shi Feng and Youlan reached the City Lord's Mansion's first-floor hall, they were greeted by the sight of hundreds of loitering NPC merchants.

Youlan was stunned by the scene.

Although she did not have a very clear understanding of NPC merchants, she knew that these NPCs were similar wandering merchants who visited Guild Towns. Only, these NPC merchants were more stable and wouldn't abruptly appear one day and disappear the next. They allowed players to obtain a steady supply of rare items.

Normally, a town was considered impressive if 20 or 30 wandering merchants visited it at a single time. Meanwhile, the important towns Underworld developed only had around 40 wandering merchants present in them at any one time.

Yet, Zero Wing City had hundreds of these NPCs...

However, what Youlan did not know was that the NPC merchants present were only a small portion of those who had come to discuss business with Zero Wing City. Before this, Aqua Rose had rejected all 1-star NPC Merchants and sent them on their way. Now, the merchants in the City Lord's Mansion were only 2- and 3-star NPC Merchants.

"Guild Leader, you're finally here." Aqua Rose could not help but breathe a sigh of relief when she saw Shi Feng enter the hall. "If you came any later, the two 3-star NPC Merchants would've left already."

"What are their conditions to conduct business in the city?" Shi Feng asked.

Every NPC merchant planning to do business in a Guild City had their own conditions. They would not set up their businesses in the city for nothing. Whether a Guild could keep these NPC Merchants or not would depend on a Guild's capabilities to fulfill these NPCs demands.

“One of them wants full tax exemption and their Shop to be located on the same street as the City Lord’s Mansion. The other one has requested a Large Warehouse. This NPC has also asked for his Shop to be located on the same street as the City Lord’s Mansion,” Aqua Rose reported.

“Their asking price sure is ruthless.” Shi Feng could not help his frown.

The City Lord’s Mansion was in the heart of the city. The amount of land available in the area was extremely limited. Meanwhile, NPC merchants’ Shops took up a lot of space, and the land sold to these merchants couldn’t be reclaimed. This meant that he would have to give away two valuable plots of land for free, permanently.

As for taxes, they were an important source of income for the city. NPC merchants needed to pay these fees to the Guild every month, and the amount was based on the Shop’s rank. It was simply absurd to ask for full tax exemption.

There was even less need to mention the Warehouse. Constructing a Small Warehouse would already cost 3,000 Gold. A Large Warehouse would cost at least 10,000 Gold. However, the cost of construction was not the main issue. The crucial point was the amount of land the Warehouse would take up. Moreover, the Warehouse couldn’t be constructed too far from the Shop, which meant that the Warehouse would also have to occupy the same area as the City Lord’s Mansion.

He had to admit that the two 3-star NPC Merchants’ asking prices were fraudulent.

“Is there no room for negotiation?” Shi Feng asked.

In God's Domain, NPCs with higher statuses would have higher intellects. Fortunately, it wasn't entirely impossible to convince NPC merchants to change their conditions.

"I've tried talking to them multiple times, but both NPCs are dead set on their requirements." Aqua Rose felt helpless about this situation. She had tried her best to negotiate for better conditions, but the NPC merchants were quite determined and had remained unfazed.

Suddenly, Youlan asked, "Can you let me give it a try?"

"You?" Aqua Rose glanced at the cloaked woman beside Shi Feng. The woman had felt familiar, and upon closer inspection, she recognized Youlan. Curiously, she asked, "Aren't you the manager for Underworld's trading firms? Why are you here?"

As far as she could remember, Youlan had always been a very capable woman. Not only had she managed Overwhelming Smile's trading firm until it nearly rivaled the Candlelight Trading Firm, but she also wielded considerable combat power.

"I invited her here. Youlan is now a member of our Guild," Shi Feng explained.

The corners of Aqua Rose's mouth twitched slightly as she turned to Shi Feng with an incredulous gaze.

Youlan had been close to becoming one of Underworld's upper echelons. Underworld, which was an extraordinary organization that had more strength and growth potential than most first-rate Guilds. The organization also had ample funding. As long as the organization nurtured enough experts, it could definitely rival super-first-rate Guilds in the future.

Yet, rather than remain as an upper echelon in a future super-first-rate Guild, Youlan had actually joined Zero Wing, which was currently besieged by numerous powerful enemies.

Aqua Rose had no idea what method Shi Feng had used to lure Youlan to Zero Wing.

Following which, Shi Feng approved Youlan's suggestion. "Alright, I'll leave this matter to you."

In any case, there was no harm in trying.

Currently, Zero Wing City's background was minimal. Attracting two 3-star NPC Merchants had been enough of a surprise already. It was only natural that these NPC merchants would have significant demands.

"Mhm. I'll try my best." Youlan nodded. She then turned to Aqua Rose and asked, "May I borrow the information you have on Zero Wing City?"

"This..." Aqua Rose hesitated at Youlan's request.

Zero Wing City's information was top secret in the Guild. Others shouldn't so easily be given access.

"It's fine; let her see it. In any case, she is already a core member of the Guild. Also, this information can't be kept a secret forever," Shi Feng said.

Now that Zero Wing City was complete, it was only a matter of time before information leaked to the public. It wouldn't really matter if Youlan knew the city's details.

Since Shi Feng had agreed, Aqua Rose then sent Youlan the information she had on Zero Wing City.

After reading the information for some time, Youlan closed the display, took a deep breath, and entered the reception room where the two 3-star NPC Merchants sat to negotiate.

Meanwhile, Shi Feng began to select the 2-star NPC Merchants that the city needed.

NPC merchants sold a large variety of items, and some NPCs were bound to sell similar items. In that case, he had to choose the NPC merchant with the lower conditions and disregard the NPC merchants with higher conditions that sold the same items. After all, Zero Wing City had limited space. A large amount of land was still needed to build other Advanced Constructions. He could not waste too much land on these NPC merchants.

After ten minutes of reading through the list, Shi Feng selected 63 2-star NPC Merchants. Not only did these NPC merchants sell unique items with very few similarities, but their demands were also fairly reasonable. They were also willing to set their Shops up in various parts of the city, which helped to alleviate the issue of too many crowds in a single area.

After Shi Feng and Aqua Rose decided the Shop locations for every 2-star NPC Merchant, Youlan emerged from the reception room.

"Guild Leader, here are the two NPCs' conditions," Youlan said. She then handed Shi Feng two contracts.

"What? They actually..." When Aqua Rose saw the new conditions on the contracts, she was astonished.

She could not believe that the two stubborn NPCs, who had refused to budge no matter how she had tried to persuade them, had actually given in.

Moreover, their conditions had loosened quite a bit. Although their demands regarding the location of their Shops hadn't changed, the NPC that had demanded full tax exemption now only wanted a 50% tax break, whereas the NPC that originally wanted a Large Warehouse had now settled for a Small Warehouse.

"I've tried to convince them to lower their conditions as much as possible, but both of these merchants think that Zero Wing City lacks a competitive edge, so they refuse to relent fully," Youlan said in embarrassment.

"Youlan, do you have the merchant subclass?" Aqua Rose suddenly realized a possibility. If Youlan were a merchant, she might have the ability to obtain these results. In that case, though, Youlan would have to be a relatively high-ranked merchant as the 1-star Merchant players she had asked for help previously had failed.

"Mhm. I just got promoted to a 3-star Merchant." Youlan nodded.

"A 3-star Merchant?" Youlan's reply astounded Aqua Rose. Now, she was even more confused as to how Shi Feng had roped Youlan into Zero Wing.

Even the strongest merchant in Zero Wing was still some ways away from becoming a 2-star Merchant. Only Super Guilds likely had 2-star Merchants at this stage of the game. Meanwhile, the higher a merchant player's star-rank was, the stronger their negotiation ability would be with NPCs. With a high-rank merchant player, a Guild could reduce prices when paying the system management fees for Shops. Whether it was the development of a Guild or a trading firm, a high-rank merchant would be a powerful asset.

“Guild Leader, you really are amazing. You actually poached a 3-star Merchant from Underworld. If Underworld finds out about this, they would definitely fight us for her,” Aqua Rose whispered to Shi Feng.

But what Aqua Rose didn’t know was that Underworld wouldn’t be the only ones looking for trouble. Even the Blackwater Corporation, which currently backed Underworld, would be enraged.

Just as Shi Feng was about to sign the contract for the two 3-star NPC Merchants, the sound of a system announcement reached his ears.

...

Star-Moon Kingdom Region System Announcement: Congratulations to Heaven’s Burial for successfully capturing the Orc Empire’s Ancient Rock City! Rewarding 50,000 Guild Popularity, 100,000 Guild Honor Points, and 150 Guild Influence in Star-Moon Kingdom.

Chapter 1559 – Four Towers of Elements Arise

“Ancient Rock City has been captured?! How is that possible?!”

Aqua Rose was dazed when she saw the system announcement.

Hundreds of thousands of Orcs defended the Orc Empire's cities. Each city was also protected by a powerful, defensive magic array. It would take a lot of time and manpower just to break through the array.

However, this wasn't what surprised her most. After all, God's Domain had many powerful tools.

What shocked her most was the timing.

Less than two hours had passed since she had received the report about Heaven's Burial's assault on Ancient Rock City...

With how many Orcs Ancient Rock City housed, it was impossible for an army of 100,000 elite players to clear the city in just two hours. There were also various large Guilds watching from the sidelines and waiting for an opportunity to strike.

Immediately, Aqua Rose began to contact her subordinates and had them look into the situation in Ancient Rock City.

Capturing one of the Orc Empire's cities was no trivial matter.

Nowadays, many players from the neighboring kingdoms and empires gathered in the Orc Empire to grind and level. Unlike the three towns in the Orc Empire that had been captured thus far, Ancient Rock City was located in the empire's inner region, rather than the outer area. If players wanted to earn Contribution Points, it was much easier to do so in the inner region due to the stronger monsters.

Now that Ancient Rock City had been captured, a large number of players would swarm to the city, using it as a rest area. The money and resources one could make with the city would be frightening. With so much income and Heaven's Burial's background, the Guild would develop rapidly.

While Aqua Rose investigated the situation, Star-Moon Kingdom's forums were in an uproar.

Heaven's Burial trapped and killed over 200,000 Guild elite players!

The various large Guilds declare their intent to wipe Heaven's Burial from the face of God's Domain!

Heaven's Burial controlled an Evil Beast army to siege Ancient Rock City!

As these posts published on the forums, they quickly received a lot of attention and made it to the top of the list.

"What?! Even something like this is possible?!"

"Crap! This is cheating! Heaven's Burial can actually control so many Evil Beasts?! Who could possibly be a match for the Guild now?!"

"It is impressive. But at the end of the day, Evil Beasts stand against the human race. If NPCs discover these Evil Beasts, they will mobilize to wipe them out. Moreover, the Evil Beast army Heaven's Burial controls has suffered significant damages. Didn't you guys see that over 80% of the Evil Beast army was wiped out in this battle?"

“However, Heaven’s Burial now controls Ancient Rock City and a town in the Orc Empire. Even without the threat of the Evil Beast army, which Guild could possibly be a match for Heaven’s Burial? I’m afraid that it won’t be long before Heaven’s Burial becomes the number one Guild in the several neighboring kingdoms. I wonder if Heaven’s Burial is recruiting?”

...

For a time, various conversations about Heaven’s Burial filled Star-Moon Kingdom’s forums.

Nobody could’ve imagined that Heaven’s Burial, a Guild which Zero Wing constantly suppressed, would rise as a dark horse.

Now that the Orc Empire effectively belonged to Heaven’s Burial, everyone believed that it wouldn’t be long before the Guild stole the position of Star-Moon Kingdom’s overlord.

As for the various large Guilds working together to take Heaven’s Burial down, everyone thought it was nothing more than a joke. Now that Heaven’s Burial had captured Ancient Rock City, even without the Evil Beasts, the Guild could turn the city into an iron fortress during its protection period, establishing an unshakable foundation in the Orc Empire.

There were no teleportation arrays in the Orc Empire. Players had to rely on their own two feet to get there. If the various large Guilds engaged in a war of attrition against Heaven’s Burial inside the empire, they’d be at an overwhelming disadvantage. After all, Heaven’s Burial’s members could resurrect in Ancient Rock City. At the same time, they could teleport to the city with Guild Transfer Scrolls, providing swift reinforcements. The various large Guilds could not afford to go to war with Heaven’s Burial for some time.

...

Meanwhile, inside Ancient Rock City, Heaven's Burial's members had already begun to reconstruct the city. They were prepared to turn the city into Heaven's Burial's main headquarters.

"Hahaha! Wonderful! This is just wonderful! It won't be long before we can open Ancient Rock City to the public! Guild Leader Singular, you and your Guild have done magnificently! With this city as our base, we won't have to worry about a lack of funds or resources when developing elsewhere! We might even attract a few more major corporations to work with us!" Lei Jinyang said. He could not help but laugh as he watched over Ancient Rock City from the city walls.

"Our success is all thanks to you, Young Master Lei. If not for your Tier 4 Domain Scroll, we wouldn't have been able to defeat the Guardian Boss so smoothly. Had we been any slower in the fight, the Evil Beast army might've been annihilated." Singular Burial sighed ruefully. Although he had been confident about capturing Ancient Rock City, now that the city was actually in his hands, he felt as if he were dreaming.

The Orcs defending Ancient Rock City weren't like those in the fields. The city's magic array had buffed these defending Orcs, and although they had a large number of Evil Beasts and Evil Demons, they had only held back the Orcs temporarily, failing to annihilate them completely.

While most of the Orcs in the city had been distracted, they had used the eight Mythic ranked Evil Earth Dragons and mercenary NPCs to open a path towards the city's Guardian Boss. Only after using a Tier 4 Domain Scroll had they managed to kill the Level 72 Orc General.

In the end, they had sacrificed six Evil Earth Dragons, over 80% of the Evil Beast and Evil Demon army, and over 40,000 elite players to capture Ancient Rock City.

Although the sacrifices had been great, they were insignificant compared to the potential profits they could gain through Ancient Rock City.

“Guild Leader Singular, now that we’ve captured Ancient Rock City, we’ll have to expand the Guild. Are you really planning to go along with the original plan to deal with Star-Moon Kingdom’s Zero Wing?” Lei Jingyang asked curiously.

Now that Heaven’s Burial could use Ancient Rock City as its foundation, truthfully, it was a huge waste of time to focus the Guild’s development in Star-Moon Kingdom.

In Lei Jingyang’s opinion, the correct decision would be to focus the Guild’s development in the two neighboring empires. After all, the empires had far more players and resources compared to Star-Moon Kingdom.

“Of course! It is about time we show Star-Moon Kingdom who its true overlord is!” Singular Burial snapped, a cold glint flashing in his eyes when he heard the name ‘Zero Wing.’

Heaven’s Burial had been forced to abandon its development in Star-Moon Kingdom precisely because of Zero Wing. As a result, Heaven’s Burial had become a laughingstock in the public eye and had been forced to shift its focus to neutral maps.

Now that Heaven’s Burial had Ancient Rock City as assurance, it had to recover its previous glory. Moreover, Singular Burial still held a grudge against Shi Feng for killing him with a single attack back in the Frozen Scar. How could he possibly shift his Guild’s development to other kingdoms and empires before getting his revenge?

...

Meanwhile, back in Star-Moon Kingdom's Zero Wing City...

"Guild Leader, this is bad." Aqua Rose frowned slightly when she read the latest situation report from her subordinates. "Now that Heaven's Burial has secured a goldmine like Ancient Rock City, although they still lack the military prowess to do anything to us, they have begun to intervene in Star-Moon Kingdom's market. Not only have they lowered prices of the items they sold in the kingdom by 20%, but they've also placed a bounty on our entire Guild. They'll pay 20 Silver for each normal member killed, 1 Gold for elite members, 10 Gold for core members, 1,000 Gold for the Guild's upper echelons, and 20,000 Gold for you, Guild Leader. They're clearly trying to defeat us using money."

"Defeat us using money?" Shi Feng could not help his smile when he heard Aqua Rose's report. "This is interesting."

"Guild Leader, you're still in the mood to smile? So far, many players on the forums have expressed interest in the bounty and have begun to plot against us..." Aqua Rose said, flabbergasted by Shi Feng's lighthearted response.

"How's the Four Towers of Elements' construction going?" Shi Feng asked as he stopped messing with Aqua Rose.

"The base structures have been completed. However, we can't do anything about the core sections," Aqua Rose said, shaking her head.

"That's fast! Only the cores are left?" Shi Feng was a little surprised. He had never expected to complete the towers' construction so quickly. "Alright, then. Let's head over to the towers."

He had waited for this moment for a long time now. In the past, he had only ever visited Guild Cities that possessed the Four Towers of Elements. He had never thought that he would get to construct the towers personally in this life.

Chapter 1560 – Competition of Wealth

“Take a look at the Four Towers of Elements?” Aqua Rose gave Shi Feng a confused look.

Although Heaven’s Burial had just placed a bounty on Zero Wing and wouldn’t be able to affect the Guild’s development for some time, the consequences would be incredibly severe if they didn’t prepare properly. In the best case scenario, the enemy would only weaken the Guild slightly. In the worst case scenario, the Guild would crumble.

Players main goal in joining a Guild was to level quickly and obtain better equipment. Nobody wanted to become prey, spending all of their time avoiding other players.

However, Aqua Rose had no choice but to follow Shi Feng’s orders and trail behind him towards the Four Towers of Elements.

...

Meanwhile, Star-Moon Kingdom’s official forums were in an uproar.

“Sure enough, Heaven’s Burial really took action! What a generous bounty! Heaven’s Burial is actually paying 20 Silver for each normal member! I don’t even earn that much in a single day!”

“I know, right? Although it won’t be easy to kill Zero Wing’s core members, it’s a different story for the Guild’s normal and elite members. If I can take advantage of this opportunity, I might earn enough money to get myself a Mount.”

“Forming a hunting party! Whoever’s interested in making some money, contact me quickly!”

“It seems that Heaven’s Burial is serious this time. I wonder which Guild will rule over Star-Moon Kingdom in the end?”

“It is definitely going to be Heaven’s Burial. Didn’t you see Heaven’s Burial’s background? Now that it has a treasured land like Ancient Rock City, it won’t have any lack of funds.”

“As expected of the Guild that took down an Orc city. Zero Wing is doomed. Even if Heaven’s Burial does not directly attack, it can easily whittle Zero Wing down until it crumbles.”

...

Everyone engaged in heated discussions about the bounty Heaven’s Burial placed on Zero Wing’s head. The bounty tempted many powerful players. Meanwhile, the kingdom’s Dark Players immediately set their sights on Zero Wing. Not only could they secure better equipment by killing Zero Wing’s members, but they’d also earn a significant income by doing so.

Moreover, with so many players targeting Zero Wing’s members, the Guild couldn’t direct its anger at a specific group. Hence, they could kill Zero Wing’s members without worry.

...

Meanwhile, in the Star Alliance's Guild Residence in White River City...

"Heaven's Burial has sure moved quickly, Guild Leader. I wonder how Zero Wing will respond to this. With Ancient Rock City's income, Heaven's Burial can definitely overwhelm Zero Wing in a battle of attrition," Purple Eye said as she read the latest report she had received.

The method Heaven's Burial employed was one of the most troublesome tactics the various large Guilds had to deal with. It was also the method that the various large Guilds avoided using.

Using such a method would require a massive expenditure. Regardless of whether one won or lost the war, they'd still incur massive losses.

However, Heaven's Burial did not have to worry about such a problem now.

Once Ancient Rock City opened to the public, Heaven's Burial would rake in an astronomical number of Coins each day. It wouldn't worry about not outlasting Zero Wing.

"That's right. Had Zero Wing agreed to the Secret Pavilion's acquisition, it would've likely avoided such a perilous situation," Galaxy Past said, lamenting.

Since the Star Alliance was now one of the Secret Pavilion's subordinate Guilds, as the Guild Leader, Galaxy Past had learned many of the Secret Pavilion's internal dealings.

The Secret Pavilion's offer to Zero Wing even tempted Galaxy Past, yet Zero Wing had rejected the offer without hesitation...

Had Zero Wing accepted the Secret Pavilion's offer, Heaven's Burial wouldn't have dared to pull such a stunt. With the Pavilion's support, Heaven's Burial would likely burn out long before Zero Wing.

...

Meanwhile, When Singular burial read the message he had just received in Ancient Rock City, he sneered.

"Daybreak did a magnificent job. I can't wait to see how Zero Wing intends to survive in Star-Moon Kingdom." Singular Burial was delighted as he read the report Daybreak Fog had sent him.

When Zero Wing had declared that Stone Forest Town would no longer allow entry to merchant players and adventurer teams that visited Red Iron Town, it had caused Heaven's Burial tremendous losses. Now, he would ensure that Zero Wing would experience the same feeling.

"Guild Leader Singular, you are ruthless. Zero Wing will definitely lose its position as Star-Moon Kingdom's number one Guild. In the end, it might be forced to leave Star-Moon Kingdom entirely," Lei Jingyang said, laughing.

"Zero Wing only has itself to blame for making an enemy of Heaven's Burial!" Singular Burial growled. "It won't be long before I can eliminate Zero Wing from Star-Moon Kingdom entirely!"

Although it was very costly to place a bounty on every player in Zero Wing, it would be devastating to the Guild.

If Zero Wing's members had to deal with constant ambushes out in the fields, it would only be a matter of time before they withdrew from the Guild. After all, repeated deaths would impede their progress in God's Domain. Similarly, no one would be willing to join the Guild in fear of becoming a target. Not only would Zero Wing's development stagnate, but it would also have to spend a significant amount of its funding to compensate its Guild members' losses.

With a constant drain on Zero Wing's numbers and funds, Zero Wing would either crumble or be forced out of Star-Moon Kingdom even if heaven's Burial didn't take any direct action.

...

While the various large Guilds wondered about how Zero Wing intended to pull itself out of this mess, Shi Feng arrived before one of the Four Towers of Elements.

The Four Towers of Elements occupied the city's four corners. Each tower was 100 meters tall, looming like giants as they protected Zero Wing City.

"Guild Leader, a report just came in. Players have begun to ambush many of our members. Based on our initial estimates, we've already suffered over 4,000 casualties..." Aqua Rose frowned as she looked at the report a subordinate had sent.

The Guild would have to play a lot of Coins as compensation with so many casualties. If this situation continued for a long time, not even the profits they earned from the Candlelight Trading Firm would be enough to compensate the Guild members.

Moreover, this was still not the most crucial issue.

The Guild's prestige was their bigger concern.

"There sure are a lot of players prioritizing money over their own lives." Even Shi Feng was a little astonished.

Zero Wing's recruitment standards were very high. Unless there was an overwhelming difference between the two sides' combat power, players would have a very difficult time killing Zero Wing members and would doubtlessly sustain serious damage. And yet after such a short time since Heaven's Burial announced its bounty, Zero Wing had lost over 4,000 lives. This situation somewhat exceeded Shi Feng's expectations.

"Guild Leader, what should we do?" Aqua Rose asked.

"Since Heaven's Burial wants to play, then we'll play," Shi Feng said, chuckling. "First, have our Guild members move in teams from now on. Anyone who refuses will not receive any compensation should they die. Also, announce to the public that anyone who dares to kill Zero Wing's members will be permanently blacklisted and barred from all of Zero Wing's towns and cities. In addition, place a bounty on every player in Heaven's Burial. Not only will this bounty be effective in Star-Moon Kingdom, but it will also be effective in the Orc Empire!"

When the two women heard Shi Feng's decision, Aqua Rose and Youlan fell silent.

Shi Feng basically wanted to compete with Heaven's Burial with wealth...

Not only would their Guild suffer tremendous losses by doing so, but if they handled this badly, they could even self-destruct.

“Guild Leader, with our Guild’s current funds, I’m afraid that...” Aqua Rose could not help but try to dissuade Shi Feng.

To construct Zero Wing City, develop the Branch Guild in the Black Dragon Empire, and supply their Guild members with Mounts, they spent a massive amount of money each day. Adding yet another significant expenditure would only hamper the Guild’s development.

“Don’t worry about our funds. You can only reap the benefits once you’ve paid the price. In three hours, we’ll open Zero Wing City to the public. Go and make the announcement,” Shi Feng ordered with a shrug. He then walked towards the tower before him.

“This...” Aqua Rose felt a headache brew when she heard Shi Feng’s commands.

Zero Wing City still lacked much of its infrastructure. To put it simply, the city had very little to attract players right now. Moreover, inviting players into the city now would complicate construction in Zero Wing City. As far as she was concerned, opening the city to the public now wasn’t wise.

Unfortunately, since Shi Feng had made his decision, she had no choice but to follow his orders.

Immediately, Aqua Rose made the necessary arrangements and posted Shi Feng’s declaration on the official forums in Zero Wing’s name.

Chapter 1561 – Mana Rain

After Aqua Rose quoted Shi Feng on Star-Moon Kingdom's forums, the players had originally focused on Heaven's Burial's declaration shifted their attention to her post.

The title of the post was eye-catching.

If you want a fight, we'll give you a fight!

"This is insane! Zero Wing must've lost its mind!"

"Is this for real? Zero Wing actually dares to pull something like this?"

"Isn't Zero Wing afraid of Heaven's Burial whittling them down to nothing?"

"Amazing! As expected of Zero Wing!"

"Hmph, Zero Wing is just trying to save its reputation by doing something like this. Even if Zero Wing blacklists the players that target its members, what can it do if those people use Black Cloaks?"

"That's right! This also gives us more opportunities to earn money. The bounties on both sides are the same. Heaven's Burial also has more members than Zero Wing, and they're weaker. If you really want to earn money, killing Heaven's Burial's members is the way to go."

...

Zero Wing's response to Heaven's Burial's provocations shocked the players on the forums. They were also delighted.

After all, they just gained another source of income. Now they could target more than just Zero Wing's members. They could even head to the Orc Empire to level up and earn for Contribution Points while grinding for Heaven's Burial members.

When the various major powers saw Zero Wing's reply, they laughed at Zero Wing's foolishness.

Of all the things Zero Wing could've chosen to compete with Heaven's Burial in, the Guild had chosen wealth.

Zero Wing was overestimating itself and seeking self-destruction!

...

"Just what is Zero Wing trying to do? Is it really intent on duking it out with Heaven's Burial?" Galaxy Past felt confused when he saw this message.

In his opinion, Zero Wing should still have methods of dealing with Heaven's Burial's bounty. Although the result wouldn't change regardless of what Zero Wing did, they could buy some time, using it as an opportunity to look for other methods, such as seeking collaborators.

Although Zero Wing's situation was perilous, with the Guild's current foundations, there should be plenty of major corporations and superpowers willing to acquire the Guild. After all, Zero Wing's Stone Forest Town still held the Battle Arena and Advanced Auction House, which could rake in plenty of resources for a considerable time. The Guild still had great potential for growth. Moreover, Zero Wing and Phoenix Rain, who now had control over a portion of Thunder Island, were connected.

...

When Singular Burial received news of Zero Wing's declaration, his expression darkened.

"Guild Leader Singular, it seems that Zero Wing is aiming for mutual destruction. Do you need my Thunder Legion to pay Zero Wing a visit?" Lei Jingyang said, smiling when he read Aqua Rose's forum post.

He had commanded the Thunder Legion, a collection of experts, for many years. The legion was particularly fond of ambushes and assassinations in the field.

Ordinary players might not be able to deal with Zero Wing's 100-man teams, but they would be child's play to the Thunder Legion.

"No need. Since Zero Wing dares to make such a move, I want to see how long they can last against!" Singular Burial said, sneering.

If Zero Wing had turtled, he might have needed Lei Jingyang's help.

Although Zero Wing's bounty on Heaven's Burial would cause him a lot of trouble, he'd also be able to remove Zero Wing from Star-Moon Kingdom much sooner than he had hoped.

He also refused to believe that Zero Wing's financial strength could surpass his.

At this moment, a slightly chubby, middle-aged man approached Singular Burial and reported, "Guild Leader, the city's basic infrastructure has been repaired. The NPC guards we hired have arrived as well. We can open Ancient Rock City to the public at any time now. Many adventurer teams and merchant players have requested to garrison and set up stalls in the city."

"Good. Open the city to the public. Let the players waiting outside the city come in," Singular Burial commanded hurriedly. He was joyful when he heard that they finished the city's infrastructure. "Gather the adventurer teams and merchant players, and I'll go meet them."

The so-called basic infrastructure referred to smithies and hotels. These buildings provided essential services to the adventurer teams grinding in the Orc Empire. With these businesses, Heaven's Burial could collect a lot of repair fees and accommodation fees.

Moreover, his people were constantly perfecting Ancient Rock City. In the future, Heaven's Burial could sell various Consumable items as well, earning a fortune.

The Orc Empire was a neutral map. Players had great difficulty traveling to and from the empire. If players wished to stay in the empire for long periods, basic Consumable items were a must. As long as Heaven's Burial sold these Consumable items, a large number of players would come to purchase them. They wouldn't have to worry about a lack of customers.

Zero Wing's Stone Forest Town simply couldn't compare to the wealth Heaven's Burial could collect from Ancient Rock City.

"Understood! I'll have them gather in Ancient Rock City immediately!" The middle-aged man then turned and left to notify the various adventurer teams and merchant players.

...

When Ancient Rock City opened to the public, news of this spread like wildfire, reaching the ears of the neighboring kingdoms and empires in a matter of minutes.

The Orc Empire had only had three Guild Towns in the past. Moreover, all three had been in the Orc Empire's outer region, making it troublesome to grind for Contribution Points. Players had still needed to travel to the empire's inner region due to the low number of monsters in the outer area. As a result, many players dismissed the idea of traveling to the Orc Empire entirely.

However, now that a Guild City occupied the empire's inner region, not only would players save on travel time, but they could also accept quests more easily. After all, cities offered far more quests than towns. Moreover, the rewards of these quests were more abundant.

...

Meanwhile, in the distant Zero Wing City, Aqua Rose frowned as she read through the reports her subordinates had sent.

Ancient Rock City's popularity had far exceeded her expectations. Based on the latest reports, over 2,000,000 players were moving into the Orc Empire. Needless to say, these players would visit Ancient Rock City when they needed to recuperate. Many more players from the neighboring countries were also preparing for their trip to the Orc Empire.

With so many players, one could just imagine the wealth Ancient Rock City would generate.

As Aqua Rose racked her brain for a solution, she felt the space around her suddenly tremble. Moreover, these tremors steadily intensified. It felt as if the space around her would shatter at any moment.

"This is..."

Aqua Rose lifted her head to look towards the Four Towers of Elements. The four towers seemed to be the epicenters of these tremors.

Suddenly, a fourfold magic array appeared above each of the Four Towers of Elements, radiating an aura so powerful that even an expert like Aqua Rose couldn't help but shudder in fear.

A short moment later, a link formed between the four fourfold magic arrays hovering above Zero Wing City's four corners. A towering pillar of light then emerged from each of the arrays, rising endlessly into the sky.

These four light pillars represented the four main elements: earth, water, wind, and fire!

As the light pillars rose, a frightening amount of Mana began to gather above Zero Wing City. The pillars gathered Mana from tens of thousands of yards around the city, and very quickly, the Mana around the

city became so dense that it transformed into a white mist. As the mist gathered above the city, it began to condense into droplets and rained down, washing Zero Wing City in liquid Mana.

Everyone in Zero Wing City was dumbfounded.

None of them had ever felt such dense Mana before. Their minds were clearer than ever.

However, this Mana Rain did not last long. The sky above the city soon returned to its normal state, and the Mana density in the city began to decrease.

Even after the city's Mana density stabilized, Zero Wing City's Mana was far denser than in Stone Forest Town. At the very least, Zero Wing City's Mana density was 30% higher than in the Guild Town...

Chapter 1562 – The Power of the Four Towers of Elements

“What's going on with the city's Mana?”

When the players in Zero Wing City felt the change in the Mana density around them, they felt an indescribably pleasant sensation. However, this pleasant sensation didn't originate from bathing in high amounts of Mana, but from a power that nourished their souls.

While everyone lost themselves in the sensation, a few Guild members noticed a change to their experience bars.

The Double EXP buff indicator, which usually only appeared after they rested in a Private Room, had actually popped up near their experience bars...

“This can’t be real, right? We can actually accumulate the Double EXP buff just by staying in the city?”

“That’s not all! My Stamina and Concentration recovery rates are as high as when I recover in a hotel!”

...

Very quickly, more players inside the city discovered the peculiarities from bathing in the city’s Mana.

So, this is the power of the Four Towers of Elements? Aqua Rose could not help but grow ecstatic as she stared at one of the Four Towers of Elements erected before her.

She had been curious about Shi Feng focusing on an Advanced Construction like the Four Towers of Elements rather than setting up the city’s basic infrastructure. He had even decided to open Zero Wing City to the public soon. Now, she finally understood his decisions.

Although Zero Wing City still lacked many basic features a city ought to have, this special Mana density was enough to secure Zero Wing’s position in Star-Moon Kingdom. No Guild Town could ever rival Zero Wing City with its advantages, whether it was in terms of Guild development or the ability to attract players.

Not only would Zero Wing City's incredibly high Mana density be helpful to combat players, but it would also benefit Lifestyle players. The city's Mana also allowed players to accumulate the Double EXP buff and improved their Stamina and Concentration recovery rates.

These benefits might not attract players seeking to adventure in the Orc Empire, but to players who wanted to develop in Star-Moon Kingdom, Zero Wing City would be a holy land. Moreover, it was considerably easy for players to travel to Zero Wing City. Zero Wing had already garrisoned in Evernight City, and they could open a teleportation channel between Evernight City and Zero Wing City at any time.

"Aqua, make a trip to Evernight City and set up the teleportation array linking Zero Wing City and Evernight City. Once you're done, announce the link to the public," Shi Feng, who had just emerged from the tower after drawing the final magic array, ordered.

"Alright, I'll head out immediately." Aqua Rose nodded, clearly excited. She then took out a Return Scroll and teleported back to White River City.

Meanwhile, Youlan, who stood beside Aqua Rose, was still immersed in the city's ambient Mana, unable to calm her pounding heart.

Is this Zero Wing's true power? Youlan could not help but raise her head and look at Shi Feng, indescribable shock filling her heart.

She had to admit that Zero Wing was truly awe-inspiring.

She finally understood why Shi Feng didn't fear the Blackwater Corporation.

In response to the surprised expression on Youlan's face, Shi Feng merely chuckled. After all, this was only the beginning.

Next, we'll need to build even more hotels and Mana Towers. Shi Feng smiled at Zero Wing City's numerous empty plots of Land.

In reality, the Four Towers of Elements' effects weren't as simple as everyone assumed. It was an Advanced Construction that required Seven Luminaries Crystals, after all.

Not only would players enjoy double the recovery rates when resting in hotels, under the towers' influence, but the Double EXP buff's accumulation rate would also double. With this, Zero Wing City's normal hotels were even more effective than 1-star Private Rooms in Guild Residences.

Naturally, this improved the effect of Guild Residences' Private Rooms in Zero Wing City as well.

This perk would make it far easier for players who strove to level up. Although players could only accumulate up to one level of the Double EXP buff, that was extremely valuable. Just being able to accumulate the Double EXP buff while resting was amazing. This was especially true for independent players.

But this was only the tip of the iceberg.

The Four Towers of Elements' truly impressive aspect was their ability to increase the distance of teleportation.

Although the teleportation distance to and from a city was determined on the city's scale and Mana density, the towers' minimum teleportation range was 3,000,000 yards. At such a distance, one could easily cross three or more leveling maps. It covered even more distance than the Seven Luminaries Ring's Space Movement. The only downside was its significant cost. Teleporting every player required a significant amount of Mana, the supply of which had to be in the form of Magic Crystals. The Four Towers of Elements' cost was nearly as much as a Teleportation Magic Array's. However, unlike the Four Towers of Elements, the latter allowed players to teleport across extremely large distances.

Even so, the various large Guilds in the past had tried everything they could to obtain this function.

Naturally, this function made it extremely convenient to travel to nearby leveling maps. As long as a map was within the towers' teleportation range, players could teleport after registering the proper coordinates, saving countless hours of travel time. Not only would players be able to level up far more quickly, but they could also explore further locations without hampering their development.

According to Shi Feng's estimates, the Four Towers of Elements should be able to teleport players up to 4,000,000 yards away with Zero Wing City's current standards. This meant that players could travel even further away than Bewildering Forest Town in an instant. Players could teleport to the border between Star-Moon Kingdom and the Orc Empire.

If he constructed a Mana Tower, the symbol of Guild Cities, in Zero Wing City, the Four Towers of Elements might even be able to teleport players into the Orc Empire.

If teleporting directly into the Orc Empire were possible, players seeking to travel to the empire to level could do so via Zero Wing City. It would save players a lot of time, and they could avoid the Orc patrol squads guarding the empire's borders.

Zero Wing City's value to the public would soar.

However, constructing the Mana Tower also wasn't easy.

Unlike the Magic Tower, which was a defensive structure, the Mana Tower was a support building unique to cities. Unfortunately, despite the fact that Guild Cities could construct Mana Towers without the design, the construction required extremely rare and valuable materials. The Mana Ore, in particular, was incredibly difficult to obtain.

Normally, obtaining Mana Ore wouldn't be a problem for Shi Feng. It was entirely possible to purchase large quantities from the market. However, due to the Orc Empire, collecting 5,000 pieces of Mana Ore had become challenging.

It seems that I'll have to deal with the Disintegration Armor as soon as possible. Shi Feng could not help but glance at the Disintegration debuff in his status window. As long as this debuff remained, he'd have a lot of trouble dealing with many issues. Following which, he turned to Youlan and said, "Youlan, from now on, I'd like you to manage Zero Wing City and Stone Forest Town's Candlelight Trading Firm. If you need any help from the Guild, you can look for Aqua Rose. I've already told her."

"You want me to take on such an important role?" Youlan was stunned.

She had never dreamed that Shi Feng considered her so important, allowing her to manage the trading firms in two integral locations. Stone Forest Town's trading firm was one of Zero Wing's main sources of income. As for the trading firm in Zero Wing City, there was no doubt that it would rake in even more income than Stone Forest Town.

"Mhm. I trust in your abilities." Shi Feng nodded. He had seen Youlan's management skills long ago. Moreover, Youlan was a 3-star Merchant.

Youlan fell silent as she evaluated the man before her. She simply could not understand what was going through Shi Feng's mind.

Normally, no Guild would allow an outsider, who had recently joined the Guild, to take on such an important management role, yet Shi Feng had done so without hesitation...

“Alright, but I won’t be responsible if things go south,” Youlan said, smiling.

Shi Feng couldn’t help but laugh at Youlan’s reply. He then notified Aqua Rose and had the two women work out the finer details amongst themselves. He then returned to Zero Wing’s Residence and collected some Consumables and Magic Scrolls from the Guild Warehouse. He then used Moloch’s Ring to teleport to the Dark Den’s central region.

Meanwhile, Aqua Rose began to spread the news of Zero Wing City opening to the public throughout Star-Moon Kingdom.

Chapter 1563 – Zero Wing City’s Grand Opening

The resulting response to the announcement of Zero Wing’s opening paled in comparison to the announcement regarding Ancient Rock City. Due to small information leaks, players had already discovered Zero Wing City’s location in Witch’s Hill. The resource maps near Witch’s Hill were ordinary and held little attraction for the majority of Star-Moon Kingdom’s players.

“Zero Wing City has already opened? This is good news.”

“Zero Wing must be trying to earn money to stand against Heaven’s Burial. It’s a pity that there’s nothing valuable about the city’s location. At most, the city has more space to accommodate players. It likely won’t hold up to Stone Forest Town’s performance.”

“I’d rather go to Stone Forest Town instead. I’ve heard that you even have to pay a 30-Copper entrance fee to get into Zero Wing City. That’s insane! Not even Ancient Rock City charges an entrance fee! What’s so special about Zero Wing City that warrants an entrance fee?!”

“That’s right. If I were an expert, I wouldn’t visit Zero Wing City, either. Besides, there’s a ton of experts in Stone Forest Town. If I want to improve via duels, Stone Forest Town is undoubtedly the better choice.”

...

Although news of Zero Wing City’s opening had spread across Star-Moon Kingdom, very few players were interested in the city. Instead, the majority of the kingdom’s players focused on a way to travel to the Orc Empire so they could earn Contribution Points to purchase set equipment and Mounts.

Zero Wing City would likely only be useful after they reached Level 50 or 60.

...

“Does Zero Wing really think it can contend with Heaven’s Burial just by having a city in Star-Moon Kingdom?” Galaxy Past was confused as he read the latest report on Zero Wing. “Do they really plan to fight to the bitter end?”

While a Guild City could generate more income than a Guild Town, the necessary investments were much higher. Zero Wing had only recently completed Zero Wing City, and the city's infrastructure wasn't yet perfected. The city still lacked the benefits of Stone Forest Town, not to mention Ancient Rock City.

Ancient Rock City was an Orc City; it already had all of the essential facilities. The city only lacked a teleportation array. However, Ancient Rock City's location was absolutely perfect. Countless players in multiple kingdoms and two empires had already set their sights on the Orc Empire's inner region. Heaven's Burial could make a fortune just from the repair and accommodation fees, not to mention the daily Consumable items it sold.

Galaxy Past wasn't the only one with such thoughts. When Star-Moon Kingdom's upper echelons heard the news, they, too, thought that Zero Wing was trying to buy time. Otherwise, the Guild wouldn't push out a half-completed Guild City.

...

"Big Sis Aqua, although we've already spread the news, everyone still seems more interested in Ancient Rock City. Thus far, only a few merchant players and adventurer teams have contacted us about garrisoning in Zero Wing City," a Level 29 female Summoner reported to Aqua Rose helplessly. The female Summoner wore a light purple dress with a 1-star Merchant's Insignia pinned above her left breast.

Before the announcement of Ancient Rock City's opening, plenty of merchant players had contacted them about conducting business in Zero Wing City. Various well-known adventurer teams had also expressed their interest in purchasing private houses. Unfortunately, before they had prepared the necessary contracts, Heaven's Burial had opened Ancient Rock City to the public. In the end, these merchant players and adventurer teams had abandoned Zero Wing City, making their way toward the competing Ancient Rock City...

“It’s fine. Catching everyone’s attention is enough for now. We just need to wait.” Aqua Rose had expected this situation, so she wasn’t surprised in the least by the public’s reactions. “If the merchant players and adventurer teams contact us again, tell them that these are our conditions.”

“This...” The female Summoner was momentarily speechless as she read the list of conditions Aqua Rose had given her.

They’d be lucky enough if they found any merchant players interested in renting Zero Wing City’s Shops. The new conditions Aqua Rose proposed were simply absurd.

Initially, they had only planned to charge 120 Gold per week for the Shops in Zero Wing City’s outer areas. This was already expensive compared to the rental prices in Guild Towns. The high potential Shops’ rental had been set at 200 Gold per week, and those in the city’s core would’ve cost 300 Gold per week.

Very few merchant players could afford such a high price. Normally, only Guilds’ trading firms could afford these Shops’ rent. Without sufficient sales, merchants might not even earn back the cost of their items after taking into account the weekly rent.

Yet, Aqua Rose had raised the fees. If the merchant players were to find out about this, they would most likely choke from anger.

Now, each Shop in the outer areas would cost 240 Gold per week, while Shops with high potential had risen to 400-500 Gold per week. Shops in the city’s core would cost 700 to 1,000 Gold to rent per week.

These prices were insane...

They'd be seeking fools to rent Zero Wing City's Shops, rather than merchant players!

With 1,000 Gold, one could purchase a relatively valuable Shop in another Guild's town, yet in Zero Wing City, one could only rent a Shop for a week. Only a fool would accept such a deal.

"We're sticking with these conditions. Whether they want to rent the Shops or not is up to them," Aqua Rose informed the hesitating female Summoner seriously.

"I understand." The female Summoner had no choice but to nod. Aqua Rose was the boss, not her.

...

As news of Zero Wing City's grand opening spread, some curious players made their way towards the city.

Once players had reached their levels, the 30-Copper entrance fee wouldn't hamper their development too much. At worst, they'd only pay the city one visit.

...

Evernight City, Teleportation Hall:

As always, Evernight City's Teleportation Hall was crowded with players.

“Boss, are we really going to Zero Wing City?” a Level 42 male Assassin asked the mighty-looking Swordsman before him. “Barely anyone is visiting the city right now. Didn’t we come to Star-Moon Kingdom to improve our techniques? What’s the point of visiting an empty city?”

“Are you dumb? Don’t you know how popular Stone Forest Town is right now? If we go to Stone Forest Town, we’ll have to wait for a long time before we can rent a combat room. Moreover, our aim is to spar with members of our team, not other experts. Zero Wing City’s environment might not be as good as Stone Forest Town’s, but no one’s there right now. We can rent the combat rooms there for special training. Once we’ve trained, we can visit Stone Forest Town,” the Level 44 Swordsman said, laughing.

Their adventurer team would have no trouble covering the 30-Copper entrance fee for each of their members. Time was far more precious than the small expenditure.

Hearing the Swordsman’s reasoning, the other team members agreed with their commander. Right now, their goal was to train in a high-Mana environment.

Following which, the adventurer team’s members followed the Swordsman as they teleported to Zero Wing City.

“What a bunch of fools. They’re actually going to Zero Wing City to train. Do they not know that Zero Wing City was only recently built? How could the Mana density there possibly compare to Stone Forest Town’s? Even if they have to waste some time while they wait in Stone Forest Town, it’s better than going to Zero Wing City.” When some of the players in the Teleportation Hall saw the adventurer team teleport to Zero Wing City, they could not help but laugh.

However, in Zero Wing City...

Even after non-Zero Wing players arrived, the spacious Teleportation Hall was eerily silent despite the hundred-plus players within. Only after some time did sound echo throughout the building.

“What’s going on? Why is the Mana density so high?”

“It is quite high. I’ve been to Stone Forest Town before, so I know how the Mana density is there, but Zero Wing City’s Mana density is at least 30% higher.”

“Wait! Look! It isn’t just the Mana density that’s higher! My Stamina and Concentration recovery rates have increased significantly, as well!”

“Huh?! Guys, look at your experience bars! Mine actually shows the Double EXP Buff!”

“This is amazing! I had only expected to rest and train here, but I can even accumulate the Double EXP buff?! The 30 Copper Coins were definitely well-spent!”

The players that had just arrived in Zero Wing City quickly noticed the city’s Mana and its benefits, and they were ecstatic.

Thirty Copper Coins wasn’t even a fraction of the cost of a hotel room in Stone Forest Town, yet after spending the few coins, they could constantly accumulate the Double EXP buff regardless of where they were in Zero Wing City. They could also recover their Stamina and Concentration far faster. And these effects would last throughout their stay. They didn’t even have to rent a room in a hotel.

Following a brief moment of shock, the players visiting Zero Wing City for the first time left the Teleportation Hall.

“This...”

When these players left the building, they were shocked by what they saw. None of them had expected anything like this.

The Guild had only recently constructed Zero Wing City. Logically, it should still be relatively empty, but although there weren't many players on the street, there were plenty of NPCs. Several wandering merchant NPCs had already set up their stalls and were busy hawking their wares, as well.

These wandering merchants sold a lot more items than those in Stone Forest Town.

Normally, wandering merchants had no lack of rare items for sale. Adventurer teams and independent players were often willing to wait an entire day to purchase these rare items. However, these items were usually beyond the reach of ordinary players unless they were incredibly lucky.

Yet, not a single player stood before Zero Wing City's wandering merchants...

The players, fresh out of the Teleportation Hall, turned to look at each other and gulped. They then dashed toward the nearest wandering merchant NPC without hesitation, terrified that other players would snatch up the rare items first.

Even if they couldn't use these items themselves, they could resell them and make a profit.

The 30 Copper Coins they had spent to teleport to Zero Wing City was worthwhile. By reselling one of the wandering merchants' rare items, they could make far more than 30 Copper in profit.

The players that had just arrived in Zero Wing City burnt through all of their money. Even so, plenty of wandering merchants still had rare items in stock...

“Scorpion, notify the commander immediately! Tell him to bring every Coin we have! This is our chance to make a fortune!”

When faced with the large number of rare items before them, everyone forgot their original goal in visiting Zero Wing City. They contacted their friends or adventurer teams to borrow enough money to take advantage of this valuable opportunity.

As more players entered Zero Wing City, more people found out about Zero Wing City's benefits. More and more players were also coming to purchase rare items.

Although players had tried suppressing the news regarding Zero Wing City's benefits, some players that couldn't afford to purchase any of these items decided to publish information on Star-Moon Kingdom's forums out of spite.

Large numbers of wandering merchants present in Zero Wing City!

Zero Wing City's Mana density is even higher Stone Forest Town's! Players can accumulate the Double EXP buff just by staying in the city! Pictures and videos available!

...

“There are so many wandering merchants!”

“How is this possible?! You can accumulate the Double EXP buff just by staying in the city?!”

As players continued to post videos and pictures of Zero Wing City on the forums, many of the players who had been interested in visiting Ancient Rock City shifted their sights to Zero Wing City.

Nothing was more important than gaining levels and equipment to current players. This was especially true for independent players, who didn't get to enjoy Guild benefits. It was difficult for independent players to achieve a leveling speed similar to Guild players because they didn't have opportunities to accumulate the Double EXP buff.

Independent players could also enjoy a similar benefit just by paying 30 Copper. They would get more than their money's worth. There were also plenty of wandering merchants in Zero Wing City.

Zero Wing City, which was receiving very little attention from players, became the target location for many independent players and adventurer teams. The players that hadn't had any intentions of traveling to the Orc Empire quickly made their way to Zero Wing City when they heard the news, hoping to get a good look at the city.

As a result, Zero Wing City's player population skyrocketed.

Many players in Stone Forest Town rushed over to Zero Wing City. They had only remained in Stone Forest Town because they had assumed that the town's Mana density was higher. Now that they knew that Zero Wing City was superior to Stone Forest Town in this aspect, they would train in Zero Wing City instead.

Shortly after Zero Wing City's grand opening, the player population rose from hundreds to tens of thousands. Moreover, this number continued to increase as time passed.

...

"Big Sis Aqua, good news! Based on Zero Wing City's current statistics, there are already over 300,000 players in the city!" the female Summoner named Yaya said joyfully.

"We've already grown past 300,000?" Aqua Rose was also ecstatic to hear the news.

A player population of 300,000 might not seem like much compared to Stone Forest Town's player population, which exceeded 1,000,000, but the value of Zero Wing City's player population was significantly superior.

Any player that entered Zero Wing City would have to pay a 30-Copper entrance fee.

Since Zero Wing City's player population had exceeded 300,000, that meant the city had already collected over 900 Gold in entrance fees...

This was net profit!

As more players visited Zero Wing City, the city's income would continue to rise. It was only a matter of time before the city's population exceeded 1,000,000. If Zero Wing City had a floating population of 1,000,000, the Guild would make 3,000 Gold in net profit every day. Even the Candlelight Trading Firm wasn't capable of making that much net profit in a single day.

There was also the income from Zero Wing City's hotels and Battle Arena. The income from these two establishments would likely be on par with the entrance fees. They also had the rental fees from Shops.

"Big Sis Aqua, several merchant players and adventurer teams have contacted us again. They've stated that they wish to rent the city's Shops. Are we really going to give them the new conditions?" Yaya asked as she looked at Aqua Rose.

The conditions Aqua Rose had proposed were simply ruthless. She worried that the merchant players would flee once they informed them of the changes...

"Of course. Once Zero Wing City's player population hits 1,000,000, we're going to increase this price further!" Aqua Rose said with determination.

Yaya didn't know that Zero Wing City was still an empty shelf. The many 2-star and 3-star NPC Merchants Zero Wing City had contracted hadn't built their Shops yet. Once their Shops were complete, not only would they sell items at a more reliable rate than the wandering merchant NPCs, but they would sell even higher valued items. Even more players would be attracted to Zero Wing City then. Even a population of two or three million might not be impossible, much less one million.

"I understand." When Yaya heard Aqua Rose, she could not help but pity those merchant players. Had they agreed to lease Zero Wing City's Shops earlier, they would've been able to take advantage of the sudden development and made a huge profit. Now Aqua Rose would fleece them of every coin they had.

Following which, Yaya relayed Aqua Rose's conditions to the merchant players trying to conduct business in Zero Wing City.

...

"This is fraudulent!"

"Is Zero Wing that desperate for money!?"

"Crap! A Shop on a plot of land with good potential costs 400 Gold a week?! I might as well just buy a Shop in a Guild Town!"

...

The merchant players that received Yaya's message paled and cursed Zero Wing.

If they tried to rent a Shop on a plot of land with good potential, they would have to add over 57 Gold to their daily expenditures. How many items would they have to sell to earn that back? Only large-scale Merchant Guilds would possibly dare to rent such an expensive Shop. These large-scale Merchant Guilds were made up of merchant players spread across multiple countries. With their wide range of connections, they would be able to obtain many items that would be of great interest to players.

Four hundred Gold for a plot of land with good potential? It seems Zero Wing is confident in its city's development. Susie, whom Shi Feng had met in Stone Forest Town's Advanced Auction House, smiled when she received Yaya's reply. This is a good opportunity. I might not be able to rent a Shop on a plot of land with good potential, but I should be able to rent a Shop in the city's outer area.

Although a large number of merchant players chose to give up on doing business in Zero Wing City, there were still a few of them that decided to bite the bullet and rent a Shop in the city's outer area. Although the rental fee of 240 Gold per week was still expensive, at least they could save on some of their cost.

...

As Zero Wing City became increasingly popular...

Shi Feng had arrived at the Dark Den's central area using Moloch's Ring.

The World Summit!

This was a place created by numerous Gods.

Chapter 1565 – Land of Gods

When Shi Feng returned to the World Summit's outer area once again, he felt that the place had changed since his last visit.

More precisely, it wasn't the World Summit that had changed, but himself.

When he visited the World Summit previously, he had merely been a Tier 1 player. He had been weaker in both perception and physique. He also hadn't had a clear understanding of what kind of place the World Summit was. This time, however, he noticed far more details.

He could feel a strange power filling the area. This power gave off a cloud-like feeling. Although it felt vague, it had even suppressed the Disintegration Power's effects in his body. The Disintegrated debuff had weakened his Basic Attributes by 50%. Now, his Basic Attributes were only 30% less than normal. This strange power's effect was striking.

Moreover, the closer he got to the World Summit, the stronger the strange power became.

Sure enough, the World Summit is extraordinary. It should be quite possible to obtain God Crystals here. Shi Feng took a look at the distant mountain that pierced the clouds.

He had been in a rush during his first visit. He had wanted to secure the Bible of Darkness and leave as quickly as possible. He hadn't bothered to explore the World Summit and the surrounding areas properly.

Now that he had returned, he had to research the area. After all, Gods had created this place!

If he had obtained so much from the Moon God's old residence, the harvest he could obtain from a gathering place for many Gods would be extraordinary.

His goal was to obtain God Crystals. The more God Crystals he obtained, the better since he had so many uses for them. Aside from the Disintegration Armor, he needed God Crystals to repair his equipment, such as the Nightwalker's Cape and Soul Orb. He had to search for any possible locations to obtain God Crystals.

Following which, Shi Feng began to explore the World Summit.

Time passed quickly. Before he realized it, he had already spent over ten hours exploring.

The World Summit's map was very large. It was like a large-scale leveling map. There were deserts, forests, and canyons around the World Summit. The map itself was like a miniature world. However, aside from the golden avenue, the other locations didn't house a single living creature...

Don't tell me that I can only obtain treasures by entering the World Summit itself? Shi Feng was speechless.

While there were many treasures in the World Summit, there were quite a few problems he would have while inside. The amount of time a player could remain in the World Summit was based on the strength they displayed.

Previously, he had fought desperately to gain barely enough time to secure the Bible of Darkness. Although he had grown a lot stronger since his previous visit, and he should be able to secure more time, he didn't think that he could gather enough God Crystals to repair the Disintegration Armor.

After entering the World Summit, although countless Shrines dotted the mountain, activating each Shrine would cost a corresponding amount of time.

It was obvious that obtaining one or two God Crystals wouldn't be sufficient to remove the mysterious power suppressing the Disintegration Armor, and no matter how he looked at it, he should only be able

to find God Crystals in the Epic ranked and above Shrines. In that case, according to his estimates, he'd be quite fortunate if he could activate two or three Epic Shrines.

Just as Shi Feng was about to give up on exploring the area and reached the golden avenue, he discovered something unbelievable.

What's going on? Shi Feng was dumbfounded as he looked at the golden avenue.

Players!

Other players had actually arrived in this special space!

The most unbelievable part was the number of players. There were more than 20 players just within his vision range right now. These players didn't seem to belong to a single, large team. They moved in parties of three to five people, and they were clearly on high alert despite the fact that attacks weren't permitted on the golden avenue.

Shi Feng also sensed the Power of Darkness radiating from these players. To be more precise, it was the Power of Demons. These 20-plus players were all Demon Players.

When the Demon Players noticed Shi Feng, they weren't particularly surprised. They simply glanced at Shi Feng before continuing to make their way toward the World Summit.

Could there be another method of entering this place aside from Moloch's Ring?

After watching the group of players walk away, Shi Feng quickly noticed several more Demon Players approach from behind them. It was obvious that there were quite a lot of Demon Players that had arrived in the World Summit. It was also clear that the Demon Players didn't arrive at this place using Moloch's Ring instead.

Two players wearing Black Cloaks, one male and one female, approached Shi Feng as he pondered. The man looked like a savage with his unkempt hair, while the woman was a beauty with an extraordinary body. A broken sword also hung from the woman's waist.

Shi Feng had met both these players before. One of them was Brute Spear, whom he had met on Demon Island, and the other one was Hidden Soul, the holder of 'Pride' in the Flower of Seven Sins.

He never thought that he would meet these two in the World Summit...

"Fellow friend, are you alone? How about partying up with us?" Brute Spear asked Shi Feng, who fully hid his appearance behind a Black Cloak. Smiling, he continued, "I believe you should know that you'll need to have a lot of time if you want to take advantage of the World Summit. The amount of time allotted if you clear the entrance test by yourself is too limited. You won't be able to explore much with so little time. If you challenge the test as parties of three or five, you'll be able to obtain much more time. How much time each person will get in the end will depend on your own abilities."

Among the members of the Sin of Pride, only Hidden Soul and himself had arrived at the World Summit. Most of the other players that had arrived at the World Summit had formed their own parties. Even players that had arrived alone would opt to join five-man parties rather than a three-man party like theirs.

The difficulty of the entrance test at the World Summit greatly differed depending on if you were challenging the test as an individual or as a party. In the case of parties, the difficulty was no different if you were in a party of three or five. The total amount of time allotted to a party would also remain the same. Each player in a party of five would get less than a party of three. However, a party of five would

undoubtedly have greater survivability and overall strength, which would allow the party to challenge a test of greater difficulty and gain more total time.

Now that they had encountered Shi Feng, who looked to be alone, he naturally had to ask and see if he were interested. Otherwise, the two of them wouldn't be able to take the party test and would have to resort to the individual test.

"Challenging the test as a party gives more time?" When Shi Feng heard Brute Spear's words, he more or less understood the gist of the situation. He then nodded and said, "Alright, I'll join your party."

Based on Brute Spear's words, he could tell that the man was relatively familiar with the World Summit.

Previously, Shi Feng had come as an individual, so he didn't notice that there was a party mode for the test. Judging by how experts like Brute Spear and Hidden Soul were willing to accept a stranger like himself into their party before even confirming his strength, he could tell that the party test was much more rewarding than the individual test. Otherwise, Brute Spear wouldn't bother inviting him at all.

Experts on Brute Spear and Hidden Soul's caliber were relatively prideful. If they were capable of achieving their goal on their own, they wouldn't ask for help, especially not from a stranger.

"Hahaha! Wonderful! Brother, it seems you're quite a sensible person as well! If something can be done in a party of three, there's naturally no need to do it in a party of five! Let's hurry up and head for the test, then!" Brute Spear laughed when Shi Feng agreed to his invite.

Hidden Soul merely glanced at Shi Feng before continuing on her way toward the World Summit silently.

It was clear that she held no interest in knowing a hanger-on like Shi Feng.

“Brother, don’t mind it. Our commander is always like this,” Brute Spear explained awkwardly.

“That’s understandable.” Shi Feng didn’t say much about Hidden Soul’s response. After all, his thoughts were exactly the same as Hidden Soul’s. They were merely using each other for their own benefits and were far from being friends. There was naturally no need to act chummy with each other.

Shi Feng, Hidden Soul, and Brute Spear walked along the golden avenue and made their way towards the World Summit.

Chapter 1566 – Epic Party Test

After reaching the altar at the World Summit’s foot, Shi Feng discovered that there were easily over 100 players. The majority of these players wore Black Cloaks, but there were some that didn’t hide their identities and levels.

There sure are a lot of experts. Shi Feng looked at everyone. *Has the development of Demon Players reached such an extent already?*

Even the weakest player present was Level 48, while some had already reached Level 49. These players could easily rank at the top of an empire’s Ranking List. These players also had the capability to transform into Demons, which would further enhance their strength.

The players that hid their names and levels were likely also powerful.

There were many non-human races in God's Domain. The Demon race ranked near the top in terms of strength. However, these races generally developed slowly during the early stages of the game.

On their way here, Shi Feng had learned from Brute Spear that every Demon Player capable of entering this place was a Demon Noble.

This was a benefit available only to Demon Players who had become Demon Nobles. However, it was not easy to come to the World Summit, either. They not only had to pay 1,000 magic crystals, but they also had to complete many quests from a Demon King. They would only gain one chance to enter the World Summit after they had accumulated sufficient Contribution Points. There was only one opportunity to enter the World Summit every three days.

In God's Domain, it was extremely difficult for Demon Players to obtain a noble rank. There were over a hundred Demon Nobles here now. One could already imagine how many ordinary Demon Players there were in God's Domain.

Meanwhile, even at the lowest Demon Noble rank, Tier 1 Demon Players would have their physique and Basic Attributes improved enough to rival ordinary Tier 2 players when they transformed into Demons.

The 100-plus Demon Players present could already be considered Tier 2 players.

A party of five was just finishing their battle at the altar when Shi Feng's group approached it. As the five players sat on the floor panting, expressions of excitement surfaced on their faces.

"What a powerful party! Although just barely, they actually cleared the Dark-Gold test! They'll have a good time inside the World Summit! Not only would they gain the key to open Dark-Gold Shrines, but they can also visit a few Fine-Gold Shrines!"

“It’s a pity that they’re a five-man party. If they were a three-man party instead, they’d have enough time to visit two Dark-Gold Shrines even if their test just barely made the mark for Dark-Gold rank. If they hurry, they might even get to enter three Dark-Gold Shrines.”

“Even so, it’s already a good result. After all, the previous few parties have cleared the Fine-Gold test.”

Envy and admiration filled the players below the altar as they looked at the party on it. There were also some that pitied the party. Based on everyone’s reactions, it was clear that they were all familiar with the World Summit’s entrance test. Even without the system’s notifications, these players could guess the rank of the test the party of five undertook.

No wonder they said that parties get more time. So, this is the case. Realization dawned on Shi Feng as he watched the battles on the altar.

After watching several parties of Demon Players challenge the entrance test, he more or less understood how the party test worked.

Compared to the individual test, the party test presented players with a considerable advantage. For the individual test, players were required to go up against 10 monsters simultaneously. For the party test, regardless of its size, players would have to go up against only 20 monsters simultaneously.

Of course, there were also downsides for challenging the party test. First, the monsters’ minimum standard one could challenge in the party test was different. For the individual test, the weakest monster available for players to choose from was a Common monster, whereas the weakest monster available for the party test was a Special Elite.

Second, it was far more difficult for parties to achieve the Dark-Gold rank in their tests. For example, when Shi Feng challenged the test, he was able to achieve the Dark-Gold rank just by challenging one Lord and nine Chieftains. Parties needed to challenge a minimum of one Great Lord, five High Lords, and 14 Chieftains.

The difficulty for parties was considerably higher.

Players were able to exhibit greater strength in a group than monsters though. If a party of five had a good class configuration, such as having one MT, one healer, and three DPS, the party would have a good chance at clearing the Dark-Gold party test. Moreover, the entrance test allowed external items. Only Summoning Scrolls and Personal Guards were barred. Hence, it wasn't impossible to clear a Dark-Gold party test.

Among the several parties Shi Feng had watched clear the Dark-Gold party test thus far, most of them had relied on Magic Scrolls and special tools.

A party of three approached Shi Feng's group while they were waiting for their turn. However, these three players didn't pay any attention whatsoever to Shi Feng. Instead, their gazes focused on Hidden Soul.

"Soul, I didn't expect you to come here. I suggest that you give up on the quest this time. The Sin of Wrath will obtain that item. Or do you really think that you can clear the Epic test even with a hanger-on in your party?" a two-meter-tall, cloaked man carrying a massive, pitch-black broken blade said, laughing as he looked at Hidden Soul. "You are courageous to waste two slots by coming here. If not for your elder brother strongly recommending you, you'd never have obtained the position you have today. I believe that things would get interesting if your brother found out about this."

Upon hearing the robust man's words, Hidden Soul's complexion darkened.

Entering the World Summit wasn't an easy task. There were only a limited number of quests assigned by Demon Kings. As a result, it would be very difficult for players to enter the World Summit. Demon Players would normally only use up their chance to enter the World Summit after gathering a party of three or five.

The matter this time was relatively urgent. If she didn't obtain that item, she wouldn't be able to achieve her following goals. Hence, she had no choice but to enter the World Summit with only one of her subordinates.

"Skyhawk, don't go thinking that you Wraths are amazing! We'll show you who's the truly strong one later on!" Brute Spear said as he stood forward and looked at the man carrying the broken blade.

"Isn't it obvious who's the stronger party here? Brute Spear, I advise you to join the Sin of Wrath. You'll have a much better future here. Do you think you can achieve anything by following a new commander?" the man named Skyhawk said, glancing at Brute Spear. "It just so happens that it's our turn to take the test now. We'll let you take a close look at the difference in strength between us."

Skyhawk and his two companions walked up to the altar and began their test.

As a three-man party, it would be difficult for them to clear the Dark-Gold test. The trio had chosen to challenge the Epic test instead anyway.

One Grand Lord, four Great Lords, and 15 Chieftains appeared above the altar. The instant these monsters appeared, a commotion erupted below the altar.

"Who are these three?"

“Crap! That’s a Grand Lord! Could those three be challenging the Epic test?!”

Everyone was dumbfounded by the difficulty of the test Skyhawk’s party had challenged. Only a few of the parties that challenged the entrance test managed to clear the Dark-Gold test. Most of these parties had only just barely managed to clear the test after using all sorts of tools. This was the first time they were seeing anyone challenging the Epic test.

The moment the battle began, the trio took a Tier 3 Magic Scrolls from each of their bags: a Defensive Scroll, a large-scale destruction Magic Scroll, and a Domain Scroll.

The monsters that appeared above the altar had much lower HP than ordinary monsters. They also possessed monotonous Skills, making them relatively easy to kill.

Before using the three Magic Scrolls, the trio simultaneously used their Berserk Skills. Then, they each took out and drank a potion. The Mana surrounding them went berserk.

The Burning Mana Potion? Shi Feng was slightly surprised when he saw the potion the trio consumed.

The Burning Mana Potion was a Master ranked potion. When consumed, the potion ignited one’s Mana and tripled the effectiveness of their Skills and Spells. The potion only had a short duration of six seconds; it was a very rare and powerful Berserk Potion.

While Skyhawk’s group prepared, the 20 combat puppets didn’t idle around, either. However, before the combat puppets could even get close to the three, they were stopped by a magic barrier. Not even the Grand Lord combat puppet could shake the magic barrier. A Domain Skill descended on the combat puppets, reducing the monsters’ Basic Attributes by 40%.

Immediately after, an arc of golden lightning descended from the sky and bombarded the combat puppets, instantly killing all 15 Chieftains. In the blink of an eye, only one Grand Lord and four Great Lords remained on the altar. Although the five remaining combat puppets only lost a small portion of their HPs, the large-scale destruction Spell injured them badly, their combat power decreasing even further after the Domain Skill weakened them.

The Guardian Knight standing on Skyhawk's right moved forward and used an AOE Taunt, instantly securing the aggro of the six combat puppets. The Cleric standing on Skyhawk's left continuously cast Healing Spells on the Guardian Knight. Skyhawk controlled the five thorny vines summoned by his Domain Skill and continuously bombarded the combat puppets with attacks, each attack dealing tens of thousands of damage. Meanwhile, even the Grand Lord ranked combat puppet only had a maximum HP of 16,200,000 after being weakened.

After a few short minutes, the remaining six combat puppets collapsed to the ground.

Skyhawk's party smoothly cleared the Epic test.

"They're too strong!"

"Who are these people?!"

Everyone below the stage was dumbfounded. When the previous parties had challenged the entrance test, they had ended up dead tired by the time they had completed it, yet despite challenging an Epic test, Skyhawk's party cleared it without breaking a sweat.

Standing on the altar, Skyhawk sent Hidden Soul a provocative glance before laughing and stepping down from the stage to rest. It was as if he had said, "Can you do that?"

“Damn it! When did they gather such a set of Tier 3 Magic Scrolls?” Brute Spear growled in frustration as he looked at Skyhawk’s party. Envy flashed in his eyes.

Although Hidden Soul didn’t comment, she didn’t look pleased.

“It’ll be our turn in a moment. I’ve already stated our goal: we aim for Epic rank. If you wish to withdraw, you can do so now. I won’t try to force the matter. You’ve already seen the difficulty of the Epic test. If you wish to continue, I only have one request although I don’t know how powerful you are exactly, and that is to figure out a way to distract one Great Lord,” Hidden Soul said as she turned to Shi Feng.

Truthfully, the Epic test was far more difficult than she had expected. Although she had prepared, she wasn’t confident of clearing the test.

Players only had one opportunity to challenge the entrance test during each visit to the World Summit. If they failed, they would have to wait until they returned.

“There are no problems on my side.” Shi Feng nodded. Epic Rank had been his goal all along.

“Commander, you see? I knew I picked the right person!” Brute Spear said and laughed when he saw Shi Feng’s unwavering attitude.

Hidden Soul simply smiled and didn’t say anything else.

After another party finished their test, Shi Feng’s group’s turn to challenge it finally arrived.

“Alright, let’s go!”

Hidden Soul started walking towards the altar.

Chapter 1567 – Different Goals

As Shi Feng’s 3-man party ascended the altar, Skyhawk and the others, who rested and recovered their Concentration and Stamina before the mountain, turned to watch.

“Commander, Hidden Soul’s party is up next.”

“What a joke! An Assassin, a Berserker, and a Swordsman? Do they really plan to challenge the Epic Test with that kind of party configuration?”

“If she really lets these slots go to waste, not even her brother can help her keep her position!”

After sending Hidden Soul a contemptuous glance, Skyhawk closed his eyes and focused on recuperation, paying no attention to the upcoming battle.

He had severely depleted both his Stamina and Concentration in the previous intense battle. Although the World Summit was a relatively safe place, it was not completely void of danger. He had to remain in peak condition.

As soon as Shi Feng stepped on the altar, the sound of a system notification reached his ears.

...

System: Defeat all enemies before you, and you will be granted entry to the World Summit.

System: As a three-man party, you will gain 30 minutes for every Special Elite killed, 100 minutes for Chieftains, 500 minutes for Lords, 1,000 minutes for High Lords, 2,000 minutes for Great Lords, and 5,000 minutes for Grand Lords.

System: Your party must choose 20 monsters to face. If you are unable to defeat your opponents, you will die.

System: As a three-man party, the party leader may choose 10 monsters, while party members may choose 5 monsters each. The chosen monsters will prioritize the players that chose them. Your party has 10 minutes to consider. Failure to do so will result in automatic forfeit. You will die if you forfeit.

...

“Based on our previous discussion, I’ll choose one Grand Lord and Nine Chieftains; Brute, you’ll choose three Great Lords and two Chieftains; Maple Leaf, you’ll choose one Great Lord and four Chieftains. Try to buy as much time as possible. Brute and I will deal with the Chieftains as quickly as possible, and then we’ll focus on your Great Lord,” Hidden Soul said as she looked at Shi Feng.

“Understood.” Shi Feng nodded.

Shi Feng hadn't given Hidden Soul and Brute Spear any of the names he usually used. Instead, he had given them a fake name that he had thought up on the fly.

The World Summit was a paradise of treasure. It was also a hub for Demon Players. It certainly wasn't a good idea to expose either his Ye Feng ID or Black Flame ID. Hence, he had decided to use another name to avoid complications. Moreover, he had the Nightwalker's Cape. Even if others used high-ranking Identification Skills on him, they couldn't see through his concealment.

When Shi Feng nodded, Hidden Soul chose her monsters.

However, once Shi Feng chose his Great Lord, he didn't immediately select four Chieftains. Instead, he chose one Grand Lord and three Chieftains.

Now that he had the rare opportunity of joining a party in the World Summit, he had to earn as much time as possible. After all, he needed to secure a large number of God Crystals, not just one or two. Even though an Epic party test would award a lot of time, it wasn't enough for his purposes.

Moreover, since Hidden Soul and Brute Spear were confident of dealing with their own monsters, trading one Chieftain for a Grand Lord wouldn't matter much.

By the time Shi Feng finished with his selection, Hidden Soul and Brute Spear had finished choosing their monsters. Following which, they quietly waited for their chosen monsters to spawn.

When their allotted ten minutes ended, a magic array formed above the altar. Combat puppets then dropped from the magic array.

Once the twenty combat puppets had spawned, gasps filled the air.

“What!? More players are challenging the Epic difficulty?!”

“Huh? Wait! Why are there two Grand Lords? Did they select one by accident?”

“That shouldn’t be the case. How could they possibly mess up such an important decision? If they really made a mistake, they’ll lose their lives.”

Everyone below the altar was dumbfounded when they saw the combat puppets.

In their opinion, the Epic party test was already difficult enough. Adding a single Great Lord would amplify the test’s difficulty, not to mention adding an extra Grand Lord.

Although Skyhawk’s party seemed to have cleared the Epic test relatively easily, it had been the result of precise calculation. The Guardian Knight had only tanked one Purgatory Puppet and four Magisteel Puppets due to the Domain Skill’s suppression. However, had there been one more Magisteel Puppet, the Guardian Knight would not have been able to maintain his HP above a safe margin. In that case, Skyhawk’s party would’ve likely died before the combat puppets.

The players weren’t the only ones who were stupefied. The sudden arrival of two Grand Lords on the altar stunned Hidden Soul and Brute Spear.

...

[Purgatory Puppet] (Grand Lord)

Level 49

HP 27,000,000/27,000,000

[Magisteel Puppet] (Great Lord)

Level 49

HP 16,000,000/16,000,000

[Silver Puppet] (Chieftain)

Level 49

HP 1,400,000/1,400,000

...

It seems that I guessed correctly. Shi Feng could not help but breathe a sigh of relief when he saw the combat puppets' levels.

He was currently Level 60. To current players, this was an absurdly high level, and he wanted to keep this from others.

However, the World Summit's entrance test decided the trial monsters' levels based on the highest-leveled player in the party. Hence, Shi Feng had utilized the Growth System and temporarily lowered his level to the next highest-leveled player in the party. Although doing so would reduce his Basic Attributes, it would not affect the quality of his equipment.

This mechanic had been created to allow high-level players to help their lower-leveled companions grind and level quickly, as players of significantly higher levels would take the majority of a monster's EXP. Now, however, this mechanic had helped Shi Feng avoid exposing his level and lower the difficulty of the test.

...

"Has Hidden Soul lost her mind?" Skyhawk was astonished when he saw the two Purgatory Puppets on the altar.

He had personally experienced the power of a Purgatory Puppet. Although it didn't have as much HP as a normal Grand Lord, its combat power was the real deal. If not for the Tier 3 Domain Skill suppressing and attacking the Purgatory Puppet, his party wouldn't have defeated the Grand Lord.

Based on his information, the Sin of Pride shouldn't have any Tier 3 Domain Scrolls. Even if Hidden Soul had one, how could a Berserker like Brute Spear possibly hold two Grand Lords on his own? Hidden Soul's party didn't even have a healer.

...

Everyone was flabbergasted. But what they didn't know was that Hidden Soul was more confused than any of them.

However, once the combat puppets appeared, they didn't give Hidden Soul much time to consider the surprising development. Immediately, the 20 combat puppets charged at the three players before them.

"Commander, what should we do?" Brute Spear panicked.

"We don't have any other choice. We'll use our Berserk Skills[1] and the two Mana Soul Crystals! Then we'll use Tier 3 Magic Scrolls to kill the Chieftains! Kill as many as you can!" Hidden Soul gritted her teeth as she took a crystal shard from her bag that radiated a dark-purple glow and threw it on the ground.

Reluctantly, Brute Spear retrieved a similar crystal shard and did the same.

When the two Mana Soul Crystals shattered, the space around the party grew stagnant. As a result, the approaching combat puppet's movements stiffened slightly. At the same time, their Basic Attributes decreased by 20%.

Unfortunately, despite being weakened, the Purgatory Puppets were still significantly stronger than Great Lords of the same level in terms of Attributes.

Meanwhile, although both Hidden Soul and Brute Spear wore top-tier equipment, their Attributes could only rival a Great Lord of the same level even after they activated their Berserk Skills. They were still no match against the weakened Purgatory Puppets.

Despite knowing this, however, Hidden Soul clenched her jaw and fought with everything she had.

Both Hidden Soul and Brute Spear simultaneously used a Tier 3 Magic Scroll, with one containing a Control Spell, and the other containing a large-scale destruction Spell.

The scrolls temporarily immobilized all of the combat puppets, but after the large-scale destruction Spell struck, the Silver Puppets still had over 50% of their HPs remaining. Seeing this, Hidden Soul quickly took out and used another large-scale destruction Magic Scroll.

In quick succession, Hidden Soul used three Tier 3 large-scale destruction Magic Scrolls, killing all Chieftain ranked Silver Puppets. Although the large-scale destruction Spells dealt a lot of damage, their effects were no match for those that Skyhawk had used after consuming the Mana Burning Potion. As a result, Hidden Soul's large-scale destruction Spells a moment later, both Purgatory Puppets arrived before Hidden Soul and only heavily injured the Great Lord ranked Magisteel Puppets. As for the Grand Lord ranked Purgatory Puppets, they had only lost some HP; their bodies were still intact.

Brandishing their one-handed sabers against the female Assassin, each of the Purgatory Puppets had two pairs of arms, so Hidden Soul had to face eight sabers simultaneously. As the Purgatory Puppets attacked, they sealed off all paths of retreat. Seeing this, Hidden Soul had no choice but to activate Wind Steps and utilize the brief period of invulnerability the Skill granted to block the incoming attacks and retreat. She planned to kite the Grand Lords, since fighting them head-on would be suicidal.

Unfortunately, before she could get 10 yards away from the monsters, both Purgatory Puppets caught up with her. One Purgatory Puppet appeared beside her and sent an energy slash to cut off her path, while the other attacked from behind.

So fast! Realizing that she couldn't advance, Hidden Soul spun around and met the Purgatory Puppet behind her.

Hidden Soul gracefully avoided half of the Purgatory Puppet's dozen or so attacks. She deflected the remaining strikes with her daggers and used the force to push her away from both puppets. At the same time, she also used the force of the attacks to push herself away from both Purgatory Puppets.

As a result of deflecting several of the Purgatory Puppet's attacks, Hidden Soul lost over 8,000 HP. After activating her Berserk Skill, Hidden Soul only had slightly more than 90,000 HP in total. Hence, she couldn't ignore such high damage.

Yet, seconds after Hidden Soul escaped from the pincer attack, the other Purgatory Puppet leaped powerfully and arrived before her, launching yet another pincer attack...

...

"And here I thought Hidden Soul was strong enough to actually challenge two Purgatory Puppets. She's definitely going to die!"

"Her party wouldn't be able to hold its ground against one Purgatory Puppet. They don't even have a healer. The suppression they're using against the puppets isn't strong enough. Even if they used Regeneration Potions to recover their HPs, they wouldn't last long. In the end, no matter what they do, they'll still die."

"That's right! She has overestimated herself. Does she think she can do anything just because she has high combat standards?"

The Guardian Knight and Cleric in Skyhawk's party quietly ridiculed Hidden Soul as they watched the female Assassin desperately flee from the two Purgatory Puppets. As for Skyhawk, he no longer bothered to pay attention to the battle on the altar. The outcome of this test was already evident.

...

Is this the end? Hidden Soul could not help her bitter smile when she saw that her HP had fallen below the 30% threshold.

The two Purgatory Puppets launched another two-pronged assault against the Assassin, but just as everyone assumed the battle would end, the air above the altar rippled.

Suddenly, the Purgatory Puppets, Hidden Soul, and Brute Spear felt weaker.

A shadow then appeared behind one of the Purgatory Puppets, followed by a blue flash. The Purgatory Puppet was abruptly thrown over a dozen yards away, slamming into the altar as it landed...

"Maple?"

Seeing this, Hidden Soul and Brute Spear turned to their mysterious companion with wide eyes.

Shi Feng's sudden interference stunned every watching player.

"Impossible! That's a Grand Lord!"

"What did he do?"

Grand Lords had an overwhelming Strength advantage against Tier 1 players of the same level. At this stage of the game, aside from peak MTs, players could barely block a Grand Lord's attack after activating a Berserk Skill.

Yet, not only had Shi Feng blocked the Purgatory Puppet's attack, but he had also sent it flying...

Before anyone could react, Shi Feng moved again and appeared before the other Purgatory Puppet. His Sacred Sword curved past the puppet's four sabers and struck the Grand Lord's chest.

Like a bullet, the Purgatory Demon's body shot backward upon coming into contact with Killing Ray, smashing into the ground after flying across over a dozen yards. At the same time, a damage of over - 20,000 appeared above its head.

In the blink of an eye, Shi Feng had successfully pulled Hidden Soul from her precarious situation.

Shi Feng then used the Aura of Water's Life Domain, recovering 10% of both Hidden Soul and Brute Spear's HP every second for 30 seconds.

Before Hidden Soul could say anything, Shi Feng got ahead of her and said, “We don’t have time. I’ll make things simple. We need to deal with these two Purgatory Puppets before our Berserk Skills end. Otherwise, they’ll whittle us down until we die. From now on, I’ll tank both Grand Lords while you attack with everything you’ve got.”

Although the Purgatory Puppets had far less HP than a normal Grand Lords, they still had a base HP of 27,000,000. Even after the Mana Soul Crystals and Disintegration Field’s suppression, both Purgatory Puppets had retained 60% of their Basic Attributes, putting their HPs at 16,200,000. This meant that they would recover 162,000 HP every five seconds. Even if all three players attacked the two Grand Lords with everything they had, it would take a considerable amount of time to defeat them. Furthermore, only two of them would be free to fight the Purgatory Puppets as Brute Spear was busy with the Great Lord ranked Magisteel Puppets.

They had to make good use of every second they had.

Fortunately, after stepping up to the altar, the Disintegrated debuff suppressing Shi Feng’s Basic Attributes had disappeared, which allowed him to fight at his peak. Even so, he needed to activate a Berserk Skill to suppress a Grand Lord of the same level. Once his Berserk Skill’s duration ended, fighting the Purgatory Puppets would become far more troublesome.

Hearing this, Hidden Soul realized the severity of the situation. She nodded and mentally pushed away the questions plaguing her mind.

By this time, the two Purgatory Puppets had recovered from Shi Feng’s attacks, staring at the Swordsman with emotionless, crimson eyes. The Grand Lords then released out an angry bellow, their sabers flashing as they emitted scorching, emerald flames.

This move was none other than the Purgatory Puppet’s trademark move—Purgatory Blade!

“It seems the Purgatory Puppets are finally getting serious. It’ll be even more difficult to take them down now.”

When the spectating crowd saw the emerald flames dance on the sabers, they unconsciously gulped.

Not only did Purgatory Blade increase the might of the Purgatory Puppets’ attacks significantly, but it also improved the Grand Lords’ attack range and Attack Speed. Skyhawk’s party had relied on their Guardian Knight’s Lifesaving Skill to stand against the Purgatory Puppet’s Purgatory Blade, and Skyhawk had used a portion of the thorny vines he had summoned with his Tier 3 Domain Skill to help block the attacks. Only after doing so had Skyhawk’s party managed to survive through the Purgatory Blade’s 20-second duration.

However, Shi Feng’s party did not include an MT. It didn’t have any healers, either. Defending against the Purgatory Puppet’s Skill would be far more difficult for their party. The Grand Lords’ attack range bonus from the Skill was also terrifyingly vast, making their attacks impossible to dodge.

“I’ll aggro one,” Hidden Soul hurriedly declared after seeing the Grand Lords activate Purgatory Blade. “It is impossible for non-MT classes to tank both at the same time.”

Their party’s situation wasn’t like Skyhawk’s. Skyhawk’s party had only faced one Purgatory Puppet, whereas their party had to deal with two. When Skyhawk’s Purgatory Puppet had used Purgatory Blade, even the Guardian Knight nearly died after activating a Lifesaving Skill. Needless to say, the Grand Lords’ attacks would annihilate any other class.

“No! I can hold both of them by myself! You just need to focus on dealing damage!” Shi Feng said, grinning as he dashed at the two approaching Purgatory Puppets. At the same time, he activated the Abyssal Blade’s Phantom Kill.

Suddenly, Shi Feng split into two copies of himself. Each copy then moved to take on a Purgatory Puppet.

“A doppelganger?” Hidden Soul was stunned when she saw Shi Feng split into two. She had never considered that he would have such a Skill.

Although a doppelganger’s Basic Attributes were than the main body’s, a doppelganger’s death wouldn’t affect the player. Hence, using the doppelganger to waste a Purgatory Puppet’s Skill was definitely a wise decision. If the player controlled their doppelganger properly, it might even last through the Purgatory Blade’s 20-second duration without mishaps.

As Hidden Soul pondered, she was shocked yet again.

Both Shi Feng and his doppelganger brandished their swords and clashed with the Purgatory Puppets’ emerald sabers. When the opposing weapons collided, not only did Shi Feng and his doppelganger successfully block the attacks, but they also held their ground. In the end, both Shi Feng and his doppelganger blocked every one of the dozen or so attacks each Purgatory Puppet launched. Although the two Swordsmen lost some HP as the emerald fire burned them, the damage was insignificant with Life Domain’s recovery effect.

Seeing this, the spectating crowd was dumbfounded.

“What’s going on? Is that really a doppelganger? Aren’t doppelgangers supposed to have weaker Attributes than the main body? That doppelganger seems just as powerful as the main body!”

“Crap! That guy can actually keep up with the Purgatory Puppets’ rapid attacks while controlling both his body and his doppelganger! What kind of reaction speed does he have?!”

“Amazing! No wonder they dared to challenge two Purgatory Puppets!”

“An expert! He is definitely one of God’s Domain’s monster-level experts! Does anyone know who that is?”

“I know quite a few expert Demon Players, but I’ve never seen such a powerful Swordsman.”

As the battle on the altar progressed, the crowd’s interest in Shi Feng grew exponentially. This was the first time they had ever seen a Swordsman block two Grand Lords of the same level by himself.

Many of the Demon Players present even considered trying to befriend Shi Feng.

The competition was far more intense between Demon Players than it was between ordinary players. They placed far more value on strength. This was due to the extreme difficulty of the quests Demon Players had to complete. If they could befriend a Demon expert like Shi Feng, the man might even help them with their quests. With his help, they could rise through the demonic noble ranks.

“Isn’t he the player that Hidden Soul randomly invited into her party? How is he so strong?” Skyhawk was astounded as he watched Shi Feng hold his ground against two Purgatory Puppets. The strength Shi Feng displayed was simply terrifying. “Is he some trump card Hidden Soul deliberately hid?”

Experts of Shi Feng’s caliber were incredibly rare, not to mention a Demon Player of such caliber. In Skyhawk’s opinion, Hidden Soul must know Shi Feng personally.

While the spectating crowd voiced their opinions of Shi Feng, the two Purgatory Puppets steadily lost HP.

Once Purgatory Blade ended, Shi Feng could occasionally launch counterattacks while blocking the Grand Lords' strikes. Every one of his ordinary attacks easily dealt over -20,000 damage, while his Skills dealt over -60,000. When he used Skills such as Shadow Blade and Flame Burst, his damage soared past -100,000 per hit.

Meanwhile, Hidden Soul attacked one of the two Purgatory Puppets in a frenzy. From time to time, when most of her powerful Skills were on Cooldown, she attacked with Tier 2 or 3 Magic Scrolls. As a result, the Purgatory Puppet she targeted lost HP rapidly.

Midway through the battle, though, the duration of Shi Feng's doppelganger ran out. As a result, Shi Feng was forced to deal with two Purgatory Puppets personally. Fortunately, he had an advantage over his enemies with his Attributes, so he could still tank the two combat puppets without much issue. Only, his DPS suffered as a result.

Fortunately, under Hidden Soul's full-powered assault, the duo defeated one of the Purgatory Puppets after five minutes of continuous fighting. Defeating one also alleviated the pressure on Shi Feng. Since he used the Power of Darkness, the Attribute enhancement remained intact even after fighting for so long. In contrast, Hidden Soul's Berserk Skill had long since ended, and she had no choice but to transform into her Demon form to increase her combat power.

When Phantom Kill's Cooldown ended, Shi Feng summoned his doppelganger once more, significantly increasing their total DPS.

In the end, Shi Feng still had one minute with Power of Darkness by the time the final Purgatory Puppet collapsed.

As for the remaining Great Lord ranked Magisteel Puppets, Shi Feng's Basic Attributes were far superior even without a Berserk Skill. Furthermore, his Berserk Skill was still active.

Following which, Shi Feng easily pushed around the Magisteel Puppets. When the final Magisteel Puppet died, the crowd below the altar fell silent. These players only recovered from their daze after a few seconds.

Shi Feng and his two companions heard the sound of a system notification.

Chapter 1570 – Life Rating

Serena's appearance immediately attracted the attention of every player in the World Summit.

In truth, it was difficult not to notice her.

Serena was a Tier 5 Fallen Angel. When she wasn't deliberately trying to suppress her aura, she could immobilize Tier 1 players with that alone. Even Shi Feng was afraid of Serena despite standing so far away from her. The Fallen Angel's presence dominated the area as if she owned it.

"Since someone has obtained the Inferior Legendary Shrine Key, activate the Divine Staircase!" Serena's voice echoed throughout the World Summit. Every player in the World Summit could hear her clearly. "If you wish to obtain power, perform Exploits that even the Gods will acknowledge!"

When Serena fell silent, the World Summit began to tremble. One pitch-black shrine after another rose from the ground. They hovered in the air and were connected by pitch-black staircases. This spiral chain of shrines extended to the World Summit's peak.

The formation of these spiraling shrines had lasted several minutes, and throughout the process, not a single player had moved from where they stood as they watched these shrines form in awe.

“Why did an NPC suddenly show up?”

“What is this NPC trying to do?”

“Could this be an event?”

“What’s the Divine Staircase?”

When the spiraling shrines were complete, a grounded, pitch-black shrine manifested among the many Bronze Shrines. The various players launched into a heated discussion about what this could be. Everyone was curious about the Divine Staircase Serena had mentioned.

Shortly after, quite a few players approached the first black shrine.

An Inferior Legendary Shrine Key? Is Hidden Soul’s party responsible for triggering this Divine Staircase? Skyhawk, who was already relatively high up the mountain, looked at the new pitch-black shrines with shock and envy. Not only had Hidden Soul earned a large amount of time, but she had also obtained an Inferior Legendary Shrine Key. Thinking up to this point, he immediately commanded his companions, “Let’s go! We have to take a look at the new shrine!”

At this point, he could do nothing about the Inferior Legendary Shrine Key. After all, it was a bound item. But he could get a clear idea of the Divine Staircase's function.

When players reached the grounded shrine, they examined the rules on the stone monument beside it. These players instantly revealed excited expressions.

"God! This Divine Staircase is amazing!"

"Damn it! If I knew something like this would happen, I would've waited to come to the World Summit!"

These players gazed at the stone monument as if they were looking at a peerless treasure.

How generous! Shi Feng was just as surprised when he read the Divine Staircase's rules.

Unlike the Shrines around the World Summit, the Divine Staircase's Shrines didn't require corresponding keys or time to unlock. Rather, players had to rely on their own power to ascend to the next shrine.

Since it didn't cost time to climb the Divine Staircase, players could explore its shrines as long as they had time remaining. However, the number of times they could climb the Divine Staircase depended on the type of Shrine Key the players carried.

Players could only climb the Divine Staircase once if they had a Bronze Shrine Key, while Mysterious-Iron Keys would allow players to climb the staircase twice. Secret-Silver Keys granted players three entries, Fine-Gold Keys granted four, Dark-Gold Keys granted five entries, Epic Keys would allow players to climb seven times, and Inferior Legendary Keys allowed players access to the Divine Staircase ten times. However, once players exhausted their entries, they'd be forced out of the World Summit regardless of how much time they had remaining.

Meanwhile, each time players cleared a pitch-black shrine, they would earn a corresponding number of Shrine Points. They could then use these Shrine Points to purchase various items available in the World Summit. Players didn't need any specific qualifications to purchase these items; as long as they had the required number of points, they could buy any item they wanted.

Shi Feng wouldn't have been overly surprised if the items available were merely top-tier weapons and equipment, even Epic Weapons and Equipment. The World Summit had plenty of Epic Shrines, and as long as players cleared the Epic ranked entrance test, they could easily obtain Epic items from the appropriately ranked shrines.

What surprised Shi Feng was the fact that players could use these SPs to improve their Life Rating!

It was common knowledge in God's Domain that improving one's Life Rating was extremely difficult. Improving one's Life Rating wasn't just a matter of a stronger physique. Rather, it was a life transition. For example, if one compared an Archaic Species to a normal human being, the Archaic Species' Basic Attributes would be several times higher than a human's of the same level. This was the difference of a higher Life Rating.

This was also why Archaic Species became more difficult to deal with as they rose in level.

Although players could improve their Life Ratings by upgrading their tiers, the improvement was minuscule. For example, an ordinary Tier 5 player's Life Rating was only slightly higher than an ordinary Tier 1 player's. This was also the reason that Tier 5 players were significantly weaker than Tier 5 monsters.

The Attribute difference wasn't much during the early levels, and players could easily close the gap with top-tier weapons and equipment. However, as players rose in levels, particularly after passing Level 100, the advantage of a higher Life Rating would become apparent and would only become more evident as players progressed in the game.

At which point, players might be able to kill other players of higher tiers, but they'd be dreaming if they thought they could take out monsters of higher tiers.

Only after reaching Tier 6 would players truly transition. Tier 6 players' Life Rating was worlds apart from ordinary Tier 5 players. At Tier 6, players would also qualify to challenge Tier 6 Gods.

Meanwhile, players could actually improve their Life Ratings with the Shrine Points from the Divine Staircase. Why wouldn't Shi Feng be shocked?

Based on his knowledge, the players that had managed to improve their Life Ratings by other means than upgrading tiers had been exceedingly rare even after ten years in God's Domain. Even if players found some way to do so, it would be incredibly difficult, and they'd have to rely on luck and strength.

In the past, God's Domain's various superpowers had fought frequently over such opportunities. By securing such an opportunity, they could give their players a better chance of reaching Tier 6. In fact, the benefits of improving one's Life Rating were even more valuable than ordinary Legendary items.

Shi Feng had never thought that the Divine Staircase before him would be such an opportunity.

However, when he saw the price of improving one's Life Rating, he was speechless.

Even the cheapest Bloodline required 100,000 Shrine Points and one Exploit.

Passing the first pitch-black Shrine only awarded 10 SPs. Although the others would award more, one still had to pass a considerable number of Shrines to accumulate enough SPs to purchase the Bloodline. Furthermore, Shi Feng had no idea of how to perform an Exploit, and the rules didn't mention anything about it.

Even if he collected 100,000 SPs, without an Exploit, he wouldn't be able to purchase a Bloodline to improve his Life Rating.

Meanwhile, players could purchase various other items, such as potions, designs, recipes, Mounts, siege weapons, God Crystals, and other precious items. There were even Fragmented Legendary items up for trade.

Naturally, the Fragmented Legendary items were extremely expensive. Even the cheapest cost 70,000 SPs, while the more expensive items could cost up to 240,000 SPs and three Exploits...

Moreover, players had to spend the SPs they earned with each visit as their counter would reset to zero when they returned. Fortunately, Exploits were permanent and would only disappear when players spent them or deliberately deleted them. In other words, if players had a certain item in mind, they had to earn enough SPs in one visit to purchase it.

Even so, the crowd before the first black shrine drooled over the prospects of treasure.

After all, Fragmented Legendary items were practically illusory to current players. In fact, there hadn't been any news of a Super Guild obtaining one thus far.

Suddenly, many players dashed into the first Shrine and began their ascension.

Shi Feng didn't dawdle either, entering the shrine before him. This was a rare opportunity to secure a Bloodline for himself, and he had plenty of time. It'd be a huge waste if he didn't attempt it.