

The Strongest

Chapter 561 - Business

Overwhelming Smile's Guild Residence:

Overwhelming Smile's upper echelons currently filled the magnificent meeting room.

Every one of them wore depressed expressions.

Sitting at the head of the table, Feng Xuanyang appeared utterly defeated.

Zero Wing's victory over the Dragon-Phoenix Pavilion had dealt a psychological blow to every member of Overwhelming Smile.

Originally, nobody had believed that Zero Wing could survive the great war against the Dragon-Phoenix Pavilion.

Now, however, Zero Wing was like the sun at high noon, and many Overwhelming Smile members in White River City had already considered withdrawing from the Guild.

Ever since Overwhelming Smile began warring with Zero Wing, massive battles would ensue whenever the Guilds met outside the city. Previously, they had maintained a balance against Zero Wing, fighting on equal footing. Now, Zero Wing suppressed them completely. Their morale wasn't the only thing that fell with each consecutive fight; their Levels were decreasing rapidly as well.

On the other hand, Zero Wing grew more valiant and stronger with every passing fight.

Right now, Overwhelming Smile's members no longer dared don their Guild's Emblem when they left the city, deeply afraid that Zero Wing's members would recognize them. As a result of this depressing situation, many players had begun withdrawing from Overwhelming Smile.

"Why do I have such bad luck? Back in the day, I had been adamant about joining Overwhelming Smile. If I had known something like this would happen, I would've remained in Zero Wing. At the very least, I would have been a party leader there by now."

"I know, right? Even being a normal member would be fine, not to mention being a party leader!"

Many of Overwhelming Smile's members resting in the Guild Residence chatted among themselves. At this moment, the players that had defected from Zero Wing regretted their decision.

It was especially true when they saw the Zero Wing members who had been less-skilled when they left that could now defeat them easily.

After only half a day, more than 3,000 Overwhelming Smile members in White River City had withdrawn from the Guild due to Zero Wing's recruitment. One could just imagine how huge of a blow this was to Overwhelming Smile. However, the most damaging aspect was that more players considered defecting as time passed; even some of Overwhelming Smile's middle managers began to express such inclinations.

“Do any of you have any ideas of what we can do about this?” Feng Xuanyang asked as he swept his gaze around the meeting room.

However, none of the upper managers in the room answered Feng Xuanyang’s question. They remained silent. It was not because they did not wish to answer Feng Xuanyang. Rather, they simply did not know what to say.

Before this, their Guild had recruited players in bulk and had even poached plenty of elite players from Zero Wing. Even now, their Guild’s member count greatly surpassed Zero Wing. However, when it came to an actual fight, they realized that having the advantage of numbers was of little to no use.

Currently, whether it was in terms of Levels or equipment, Overwhelming Smile was no match for Zero Wing at all. Even its momentum was significantly slower than Zero Wing’s.

What could they do in such a situation?

Moreover, the war between their Guild and Zero Wing was like a bottomless pit. No matter how much money they tossed into that hole each day, they could not fill it.

If they continued this fight, they would eventually have to disband the Guild altogether.

“A bunch of rubbish! Why do I even need you here?!” Feng Xuanyang bellowed as he abruptly slammed his hand onto the table.

Everyone in the room involuntarily lowered their heads, not daring to utter a single word.

“This won’t do! I can’t let things end just like this! Since the Dragon-Phoenix Pavilion has suffered defeat, it will definitely try to restore its reputation. Think of a way to make contact with the Pavilion!” Feng Xuanyang said, a bloody glow flashing in his eyes. Angrily, he declared, “If Underworld and the Dragon-Phoenix Pavilion join hands, I refuse to believe that we can’t annihilate Zero Wing!”

Meanwhile, in the Candlelight Trading Firm’s first-floor reception hall:

The upper managers of various large Guilds had waited, unattended, for a long time now. This time, however, none of them dared to complain.

Suddenly, the doors to the reception hall opened. Everyone inside the room turned their gazes towards the entrance, discovering Shi Feng and Melancholic Smile entering the hall leisurely.

Immediately, the upper managers of the various large Guilds went up to Shi Feng and greeted him with friendly expressions on their faces. Their current attitude was completely different from what it had been in the past.

“I already know what your goal is by coming here. I can indeed sell you some Intermediate Mana Armor Kits. However, I have a condition. If you aren’t interested in my proposal, then you may just leave,” Shi Feng said straightforwardly, showing no signs of appreciation everyone’s compliments.

“Hahaha! Guild Leader Black Flame, please, don’t hold back! No one will complain even if you have ten conditions, much less one!” Galaxy Past said, laughing.

“Right, right! Guild Leader Black Flame, tell us what your condition is! As long as it is within our capabilities, we will do it!” the Branch Leader of Emperor’s Light followed up.

The importance of Intermediate Mana Armor Kits to Dungeon raids was extraordinary.

Currently, although the various large Guilds present no longer had many problems raiding 20-man Team Dungeons, 50-man Team Dungeons were still forbidden lands for them.

Meanwhile, it was precisely because Gentle Snow had managed to obtain a large number of Intermediate Mana Armor Kits beforehand that she had gained the confidence to begin raiding a 50-man Team Dungeon.

Ignoring all else, just the Level 25 Fine-Gold Equipment and Set Equipment one could obtain already made a 50-man Team Dungeons quite attractive to Guilds. Not to mention, there were also various rare materials, forging designs, and other items.

In God’s Domain, if a Guild wished to surpass others, what did they need?

Wasn’t it equipment?

If one likened a 20-man Dungeon to a treasure chest, then a 50-man Team Dungeon was a mountain of treasure.

Meanwhile, the Intermediate Mana Armor Kit was the key to reaching this treasure mountain.

Naturally, the various large Guilds present wished to obtain this key. Even if they had to pay a price, they could easily earn it all back from the Dungeons. Hence, the various large Guilds were very eager to obtain the kits.

“My condition is very simple. You will purchase each Intermediate Mana Armor Kit for 7 Gold and 100 Magic Crystals. This is a reasonable price, right?” Shi Feng laughed.

Players could easily obtain Magic Crystals from any Dungeon. Only, the amount one could obtain varied with each Dungeon.

A Party Dungeon would drop very few pieces, while Team Dungeons would drop a little more.

Currently, each Magic Crystal sold for around two or three Silver.

The reason for such a low price was mainly due to the fact that Magic Crystals had few uses. They were normally only used in alchemy processes. However, as Guilds usually kept the Magic Crystals they obtained in their Warehouses, it was not easy to purchase them on the market. Hence, Shi Feng intended to trade for them.

With a rough calculation, each Intermediate Mana Armor Kit would come to a total cost of 10 Gold. This price was twice as high as the Candlelight Trading Firm sold them for.

“Okay! No problem!”

“Hahaha! Guild Leader Black Flame, I have no issues with this condition! I wonder how many kits Guild Leader Black Flame is willing to sell?”

The various Guild representatives immediately revealed joyous smiles. None of them had expected for Shi Feng to put forward such a cheap request.

Currently, although the Candlelight Trading Firm sold the Intermediate Mana Armor Kit for 5 Gold per kit, on the black market, however, they cost more than 10 Gold each. Even then, the demand for the kits still outstripped the supply. Now, they could buy the kits directly for 10 Gold each.

Immediately, the upper managers of the various large Guilds began voicing their requested volume.

“I want 120 kits!”

“I want 300 kits!”

“I want 150!”

...

Every one of these upper managers could not help but wish they could empty the Candlelight Trading Firm’s stock of Intermediate Mana Armor Kits. Among them, the Star Alliance was the richest, with Galaxy Past purchasing 500 kits in one go.

However, Shi Feng did not possess that many kits on hand at all. Hence, he had everyone sign a contract with him, requiring the pay upfront.

With the system bearing witness to the contract, no one worried about any potential issues. Over a hundred Guilds willingly handed over the money they owed. As for the Magic Crystals, they had already sent their subordinates to ship the crystals over.

In just a short moment, Shi Feng had earned over 30,000 Gold.

Of course, this profit did not come without a price. Shi Feng was required to deliver the Intermediate Mana Armor Kits he owed within five days.

Chapter 562 - Divine Colosseum

After the upper managers of the various large Guilds left the reception hall in high spirits, Melancholic Smile could no longer hold back as she asked, "Guild Leader, will it really be alright to sell so many Intermediate Mana Armor Kits to these Guilds?"

It would have been fine if it were the Basic Strengthened Armor Kits. After all, the forging design for this item could be obtained through various means, so other forgers could produce them as well. However, the Intermediate Mana Armor Kit was different. Shi Feng was the only person who could forge them, so the item's production was extremely limited.

Moreover, they had only initially sold the Intermediate Mana Armor Kits with the intention of attracting business to the Candlelight Trading Firm.

Now that the Candlelight Trading Firm's business has begun to take shape, there was no need to use the Intermediate Mana Armor Kits to attract more customers.

By selling so many Intermediate Mana Armor Kits to other Guilds, it would only serve to strengthen these Guilds. This would just cause Zero Wing more trouble!

"Since we are a trading firm, why shouldn't we do business when the opportunity presents itself?" Shi Feng laughed. "Not to mention, I've already made a huge profit. I should at least allow others to pick up some scraps, right?"

"Huge profit?" Melancholic Smile was confused.

"If we sell the same amount of kits through the black market secretly, we will make more than what we just did. However, my goal isn't just to earn Coins, but also Magic Crystals." Shi Feng explained, "Currently, there are few uses for Magic Crystals. Moreover, they can only be obtained from Dungeons. However, the various large Guilds normally keep the Magic Crystals they obtained for themselves. So, if we had to point out who possesses the most Magic Crystals, it would have to be these large Guilds."

"But the Candlelight Trading Firm also has plenty of Magic Crystals. We even have an entire warehouse full of them right now. We have more than what we can use." Melancholic Smile grew even more confused.

"Have you forgotten the Simulation Device in the Special Forging Rooms?" Shi Feng laughed.

Immediately, Melancholic Smile's eyes glowed as she came to a realization.

If one wished to use the Simulation Device, they needed to expend Magic Crystals.

Meanwhile, the amount of Magic Crystals required varied depending on the materials simulated. The more precious a material was, the more Mana Crystals were required.

A Simulation Device could allow a Lifestyle player to familiarize themselves with the production flow of an item swiftly, significantly increasing their success rate and production speed when it came to the real deal. Compared to experimenting and wasting actual materials, it was much cheaper to spend Magic Crystals.

Currently, the Candlelight Trading Firm was developing in multiple cities. However, it severely lacked manpower, particularly Advanced Forging Apprentices and Basic Forgers who were capable of producing advanced products. Despite the Firm's efforts in recruiting Lifestyle players from cities outside its sphere of influence, the number of players they had recruited was utterly insufficient.

Currently, player demand for advanced products was growing exponentially.

However, only Basic Forgers had a slightly higher success rate of producing items such as Level 20 Bronze and Mysterious-Iron Equipment. Advanced Forging Apprentices could not produce such items at all. As a result, the other trading firms throughout the entire God's Domain were also desperately recruiting and poaching Basic Forgers.

Unfortunately, becoming a true Forger was easier said than done.

If one wanted to nurture a group of Basic Forgers, the money required to do so could bankrupt an ordinary small Guild.

If the Candlelight Trading Firm wished to quickly nurture a batch of Advanced Forging Apprentices and Basic Forgers, utilizing the Simulation Device in the Special Forging Rooms would be the cheapest way to do so. Only, the amount of Magic Crystals required to sustain the Simulation Device for so many people would be astounding. Considering the situation again, Melancholic Smile found that the amount of Magic Crystals the Firm had stored away was indeed insufficient.

“Alright, in a moment, go and receive the Magic Crystals that those Guilds have sent. I’ve also removed the restriction on the previously reserved Special Forging Room. You can allow players with strong potential to train there.” Saying so, Shi Feng removed the restriction on the Special Forging Room. “Right, you should also purchase some Magic Crystals from time to time. However, make sure not to attract too much attention when doing so lest people start hiking up the prices.”

“Guild Leader, rest assured, I will send people to purchase them from other cities discreetly. I won’t let others find out about this!” Melancholic Smile nodded, smiling brightly. This was not the first time she had to do such a thing.

Melancholic Smile then departed from the reception hall.

“I can only lie to her like this for now.”

Shi Feng released a sigh of relief as he watched Melancholic Smile’s departing figure. In reality, he had an even greater purpose for collecting Magic Crystals in bulk.

The Divine Colosseum!

That was where Magic Crystals were truly valuable.

In the past, everyone had treated Magic Crystals as garbage as, at the time, only certain items required Magic Crystals to produce. Moreover, these items required very few to produce. Hence, players would normally celebrate if they managed to sell the Magic Crystals they had obtained.

However, nobody could have imagined that, the moment the Divine Colosseum opened, the prices of Magic Crystals would instantly soar by over six times.

The Divine Colosseum allowed players to examine their strength, and it allowed players to undergo training provided by the system to improve their weaknesses. Moreover, one could also obtain rewards from battles in the Divine Colosseum. The Divine Colosseum also had many other functions.

Due to the emergence of the Divine Colosseum, the players of God's Domain had obtained a systematic promotion ladder that allowed them to become experts quickly. Hence, the Divine Colosseum had been very popular among players.

Players were required to pay a fee in order to use the Divine Colosseum. However, one could not use Coins to make payments at the Colosseum, but Magic Crystals instead. Hence, prices of Magic Crystals skyrocketed upon the emergence of the Divine Colosseum. Even after a decade, Magic Crystals were still a powerful currency. They were worth as much as gold in reality.

Otherwise, Shi Feng would not have foolishly use Intermediate Mana Armor Kits to trade for Magic Crystals.

If possible, Shi Feng wished to turn all the Coins in his possession into Magic Crystals. By the time the Divine Colosseum activated, the 30,000 Gold in his hands would immediately become more than 100,000, or even 200,000, Gold.

However, in order to avoid attracting suspicion, he could only purchase them slowly and secretly.

Over the following two days, Shi Feng did not rest or log out of the game at all as he ceaselessly forged the Intermediate Mana Armor Kits. By the time he had cleared his debt, he had risen from Level 30 to Level 32. He had actually managed to level up twice in two days. Moreover, this was after he had reached Level 30. If it were anyone else, they would not be able to rise by two Levels even after grinding for a whole week.

Meanwhile, Shi Feng's Forging Proficiency had also risen to Intermediate Forger.

During this period, both Zero Wing and the Candlelight Trading Firm developed rapidly. It was especially true for Zero Wing. The Guild's member count had finally broken past the 100,000 threshold, and it could finally be considered a large Guild in the truest sense.

On the Candlelight Trading Firm's side, thanks to the Simulation Device, the Firm had successfully nurtured several additional Basic Forgers during these past two days.

As for the other Guilds, they had also begun their competition over 50-man Team Dungeons.

However, the thing that surprised everyone was that Overwhelming Smile had taken the lead, becoming the first Guild to defeat the First Boss in a 50-man Hard Mode Team Dungeon.

As for Zero Wing, Aqua Rose's team had only been the second to defeat the First Boss after relying on their superior equipment. The perceived failure had disheartened Aqua Rose.

Shi Feng was not surprised at all.

Overwhelming Smile had the aid of War Wolf, as well as several other true experts. In terms of the number of top-tier experts, Overwhelming Smile was far above Zero Wing. Moreover, 50-man Team Dungeons relied more on a player's combat techniques than equipment. It was only natural for Aqua Rose's team to lose.

"It should be about time to turn in the quest." Shi Feng looked at the Coins that filled his pockets. He could not help but look forward to the quest reward given by the Starstreak Trading Firm.

As one part of an Epic Quest, it had been extremely difficult.

If he had not possessed the Advanced Book of Magic, it would have been impossible for him to complete this phase of the quest.

Chapter 563 - Epic Treasure Chest

Just as Shi Feng finished tidying up the Intermediate Mana Armor Kits he had forged and was about to head towards the Starstreak Trading Firm to complete his quest, Melancholic Smile suddenly rushed into the room, obviously agitated.

"Why the hurry? Did something big happened?" Shi Feng could not help but ask.

"People from the Dragon-Phoenix Pavilion are here." Melancholic Smile hurriedly said, "They say they must meet with you. Moreover, they wish to hand you an item personally. They say that this item will be a huge help to you, and if you do not take a look at it, you will regret it in the future."

“Regret it, huh?” Shi Feng laughed. “This Dragon-Phoenix Pavilion truly is interesting. I’ve just defeated them, and already, they’re sending gifts? Let’s go see what they’re up to, then.”

The Dragon-Phoenix Pavilion was a super-first-rate Guild. Although it had suffered massive losses in its war against Zero Wing, with the Pavilion’s background, it should have already recovered most of its losses. As for the possibility of the Pavilion starting another war with Zero Wing, that was highly unlikely.

Hence, the fact that someone from the Pavilion had come looking for him confused Shi Feng. He had no idea of what the Pavilion was up to.

After entering the reception room, Shi Feng noticed that the Pavilion had only sent one person to meet with him this time.

However, the moment Shi Feng saw this person, he was immediately shocked.

Why is she here?

Shi Feng looked at the girl, who approached him slowly, the scene of many legendary wars that occurred in his previous life surfacing in his mind.

This woman was none other than the protagonist of those legendary wars, Phoenix Rain.

The Dragon-Phoenix Pavilion was split into two Pavilions. One was the Heavenly Dragon Pavilion, while the other was the Phoenix Pavilion. Of the two, Nine Dragons Emperor controlled the Heavenly Dragon Pavilion, while Phoenix Rain managed the Phoenix Pavilion.

Although Nine Dragons Emperor looked quite young, he had merely managed to retain his youth due to the technology of this era and exercise. In reality, Nine Dragons Emperor's real age had long since passed 35.

Even so, the fact that Nine Dragons Emperor had been able to become the Pavilion Master of a super-first-rate Guild at the age of 35 showed that he was a promising talent.

However, Phoenix Rain was even more amazing. Despite still being in her early twenties, she had already become the Pavilion Master of the Phoenix Pavilion. In the past, her deeds in the virtual gaming world had been legendary. As a result, the time when Phoenix Rain had reigned over the Phoenix Pavilion had been hailed as the Pavilion's golden age. During that time, the Dragon-Phoenix Pavilion had rapidly grown stronger.

At present, Phoenix Rain was the reason that everyone considered the Dragon-Phoenix Pavilion as a Guild that was closest to becoming a Super Guild.

Even the extraordinarily mysterious Great Pavilion Master of the Dragon-Phoenix Pavilion was willing to allow Phoenix Rain to succeed him, becoming the Great Pavilion Master.

Currently, Phoenix Rain wore a bright red mage's robe, the robe showcasing her exquisite figure. Every one of her actions carried an air of bewitchment, causing others to submit voluntarily.

"Hello, Guild Leader Black Flame. This young woman is known as Phoenix Rain, the Phoenix Pavilion Master of the Dragon-Phoenix Pavilion."

Phoenix Rain beamed a flourishing smile at Shi Feng. This smile alone had captivated Melancholic Smile, who stood beside Shi Feng. As for Shi Feng himself, however, other than his initial surprise at seeing Phoenix Rain, he did not react even in the slightest to the woman's mesmerizing smile.

Seeing Shi Feng's reaction, Phoenix Rain's smile became more pleasant as she said, "Guild Leader Black Flame, let's have a seat and chat properly, shall we?"

Shi Feng nodded, his mind very calm. He did not treat Phoenix Rain as if she were some unreachable existence.

Shi Feng's dull reaction was not because he had mental issues. Instead, his mind was far from ordinary. It was merely a smile. It was still not enough to make him blush or cause his heartbeat to quicken.

"Phoenix Pavilion Master, you previously mentioned a gift for me and that I will regret it if I don't take a look. May I know just what kind of item Phoenix Pavilion Master offers me?" Shi Feng smiled calmly.

"Guild Leader Black Flame really is impatient. We've only just met, yet, you're already so straightforward. I don't even know from where I should begin," Phoenix Rain complained as she sent Shi Feng a resentful gaze. Sighing, she said, "However, since you've already asked, it would not be right to refuse."

Phoenix Rain then took out a treasure chest that flashed with a purple glow, carefully placing it on the table.

"Behold!"

The moment Phoenix Rain said so, Melancholic Smile, who sat beside Shi Feng, was stupefied.

"This is an Epic Treasure Chest!" Melancholic Smile dared not believe her own eyes.

There were plenty of treasure chests in God's Domain. However, the majority of them were Common Treasure Chests. One would be lucky if they encountered a Bronze Treasure Chest, whereas obtaining a Mysterious-Iron Treasure Chest would make them rich.

If one encountered a Secret-Silver Chest, they would become the envy of many.

As for Fine-Gold and Dark-Gold Treasure Chests, Melancholic Smile had yet to see what they even looked like.

Meanwhile, an Epic Treasure Chest was a legend.

The purple glow surrounding the treasure chest before her was indeed the glow effect unique to an Epic ranked item. Hence, Melancholic Smile recognized it immediately.

"Correct; this is indeed an Epic Treasure Chest," Phoenix Rain said, her lips curled up into an enchanting smile. Unhurriedly, she said, "Our Dragon-Phoenix Pavilion encountered this item accidentally. In order to obtain this chest, we sacrificed tens of thousands of lives. I wonder if Guild Leader Black Flame is satisfied with this gift?"

"Phoenix Pavilion Master sure loves to joke. I'm certain there is nobody in the entire God's Domain who would not be tempted by an Epic Treasure Chest. Naturally, I am no exception." Shi Feng had also used Omniscient Eyes to appraise the treasure chest. There were no signs of forgery. This treasure chest before him was a bona fide Epic Treasure Chest.

Shi Feng had only encountered Dark-Gold Treasure Chests several times by chance.

As for an Epic Treasure Chest, this was also Shi Feng's first time encountering one in this life and his past.

In the past, Shi Feng had never even heard of any news of Epic Treasure Chests.

That's right. He had not received even the slightest bit of information regarding Epic Treasure Chests.

Shi Feng had even doubted that Epic Treasure Chests existed in God's Domain.

Now that Phoenix Rain had brought an Epic Treasure Chest as a gift for him, he wondered if he were dreaming.

Dark Gold Treasure Chests had a fixed chance of containing an Epic item.

What about an Epic Treasure Chest, then?

Shi Feng did not even dare to think about it. At the very least, an Epic item would drop. There might even be an extremely tiny chance that it might contain a complete Legendary item.

Legendary item... They were very limited in God's Domain. In the past, every player who owned a Legendary item was an existence ranked at the game's apex.

Just owning the Fragmented Legendary ranked Heavenly Dragon's Breath had allowed Shi Feng to have an unmatched advantage in terms of Attributes. Even a monstrous existence like Martial Dragon was forced into a stalemate against him. Moreover, he had been unable to use any of his Skills during that fight. If his Skills weren't sealed, he could definitely beat the living daylights out of Martial Dragon if he activated Dragon's Power.

On the other hand, had Martial Dragon possessed a Legendary item, Zero Wing would have definitely perished in the war before.

"I'm glad that it has attracted your attention. Initially, I was worried that Guild Leader Black Flame will not be satisfied with this." Phoenix Rain revealed an expression of relief. She looked nothing like a legend.

"Phoenix Pavilion Master, just tell me what you want. I don't believe that anyone would gift me an Epic Treasure Chest for no good reason," Shi Feng asked after calming down.

"Hahaha! Guild Leader Black Flame is indeed smart! There are no free lunches in this world. What I need Guild Leader Black Flame's help with is simple. I would not ask you to do something that will displease you. Moreover, this matter offers no harm, only benefits," Phoenix Rain laughed. "However, I will require you to sign a contract before I can tell you. Otherwise, we will have to forget about this altogether. Only, it would be a pity for this Epic Treasure Chest..."

Shi Feng fell silent. He could not understand just what Phoenix Rain was trying to do.

Phoenix Rain did not grow anxious at the lack of response from Shi Feng. She simply sipped her black tea as she waited quietly for Shi Feng's answer.

It was as if she were not afraid of Shi Feng rejecting her offer whatsoever.

An Epic Treasure Chest was incredibly precious. One could say that it was far rarer than an Epic item. The Dragon-Phoenix Pavilion had been lucky to stumble upon it by chance. To secure it, they had even paid a colossal price.

As for what one could obtain from an Epic Treasure Chest?

Even if an Epic item with bad Attributes dropped, its value would still be significant.

There was no need to mention how much the chest would benefit a guild if it contained something even better than an Epic item. Just using it as a gimmick would allow a Guild's reputation to soar, not to mention letting an expert equip it and enter a Dungeon.

As there was a limited number of players allowed to enter a Dungeon at a single time, the quality of players entering a Dungeon would significantly impact the raiding progression. If a Guild allowed one of its experts to equip an Epic item, the total damage of any team said expert joined would instantly rise to a whole new level.

Naturally, the team's raid progression would be much faster than other Guilds, having a significantly higher chance of obtaining the First Clear of a Dungeon. The team could also challenge Dungeons that other Guilds found impossible to raid. The amount of money one could save from the losses the team suffered while raiding the Dungeon would be massive.

No Guild with any ambition would let this golden opportunity slip through their fingers, much less the extraordinarily ambitious Zero Wing.

“Can Phoenix Pavilion Master tell me the method to open this Epic Treasure Chest?” Shi Feng asked after pondering for some time.

Although it was his first time seeing an Epic Treasure Chest, he had not forgotten the treasure chest’s traits due to his excitement.

In God’s Domain, the higher ranked a treasure chest was, the more difficult it would be to open.

Although Shi Feng had no idea how stringent the conditions were to open an Epic Treasure Chest, he knew that even a Dark-Gold Treasure Chest required a key. It was impossible that an Epic Treasure Chest would have no requirements.

The moment Shi Feng asked this question, Phoenix Rain could not help but carefully reevaluate her opinion of Shi Feng.

“I did not expect Guild Leader Black Flame to remain so calm despite seeing an Epic Treasure Chest. It would seem that Nine Dragons Emperor did not lose without reason,” Phoenix Rain praised.

Any ordinary person’s first reaction when seeing a treasure chest would be to claim it for themselves. Even the Guild Leader of a first-rate Guild, someone who had undergone the tempering of many storms, would grow excited should they encounter an Epic Treasure Chest. It was simply impossible to stay calm. After all, the potential benefits one could gain from an Epic Treasure Chest were almost limitless, so much so that it could be the turning point of a Guild. Hence, how could anyone possibly stay calm when an Epic Treasure Chest was within their reach?

Yet, Shi Feng had not forgotten the fact that there was no such thing as a free lunch in this world.

“Indeed, just as Guild Leader Black Flame has surmised, there is a condition to open this Epic Treasure Chest. However, this condition should not be difficult for a Guild like Zero Wing to meet. Even if it isn’t possible now, it will be in the future. It is only a matter of time.” Phoenix Rain came clean without trying to hide anything.

“May I know what the condition is for opening this treasure chest?” Shi Feng smiled bitterly.

How could he not tell that Phoenix Rain was trying to hide something?

This was an Epic Treasure Chest!

Just a Dark-Gold Treasure Chest already required a Dark-Gold ranked key to open it. However, a Dark-Gold Key was even rarer than the Dark-Gold Treasure Chest itself. If an Epic Treasure Chest required an Epic Key to open, Shi Feng could do without it.

Phoenix Rain frowned slightly. She did not think Shi Feng would be so adamant for an answer.

Although an Epic Treasure Chest was indeed tempting, she had held the chest for a long time now. Unfortunately, she had no way to open it and could only stare blankly at the glowing chest. Otherwise, who would possibly use such a priceless item as a bargaining chip?

However, she never expected that Shi Feng would not take her bait...

“Hah... Forget it. I believe that, if I don’t tell you, you will most likely refuse to negotiate,” Phoenix Rain sighed. “Truth be told, the condition for opening this treasure chest is relatively simple. One only needs to gather eighty-eight Mana Stones. I have investigated the Mana Stones somewhat. They only drop from 100-man Dungeons with a certain probability. Of course, it will not be possible to gather eighty-eight pieces within a short time. However, with Zero Wing’s strength, collecting them will only be a matter of time, right?”

“Mana Stones?” Shi Feng hurriedly suppressed the excitement in his heart, not daring to reveal it. “I have also heard of this item before. However, I heard that they are extremely rare. Obtaining just one would require a tremendous amount of effort, let alone eighty-eight. At the very least, it would take several months to collect that many.”

Previously, in order to remove the seal on the Destroyer of Immortality, he had discovered a method to obtain Mana Stones that did not require raiding 100-man Hard Mode Team Dungeons. Although eighty-eight Mana Stones was not a small amount, and he would be required to spend a lot of money, it was still much easier than trying to obtain them from 100-man Dungeons, betting on that meager 2% drop rate.

“Guild Leader Black Flame, although you will only be able to open the treasure chest after one or two months, an Epic item will still be extremely rare after that much time has passed. Not to mention, Epic items aren’t the only thing you can obtain from an Epic Treasure Chest. If Guild Leader Black Flame obtains a Legendary item, at that time, you will have truly made a fortune,” Phoenix Raid hurriedly explained when she saw Shi Feng’s disappointed expression.

“You are correct. However...” Shi Feng muttered, revealing a troubled expression.

However, when he saw Phoenix Rain trying her best to push the treasure chest onto him, he was inwardly exhilarated.

Indeed, just as Phoenix Rain had said, in the past, even after three months since God's Domain launched, Dark-Gold items were still as rare as a phoenix's feather, not to mention Epic items. Back then, only Super Guilds and a few extremely lucky Guilds possessed Epic items. As for Fragmented Legendary and Legendary items, there had been no news whatsoever about these items.

If Shi Feng could obtain an Epic item in three months' time, he would make a huge fortune. After all, one could continue to use an Epic item to a very high Level. There was no need to worry about it becoming obsolete during the initial stages of the game.

"Guild Leader Black Flame, you should know that my request of you will not be difficult to complete. Moreover, it is something that will benefit you as well. I even offer you this Epic Treasure Chest as a gift. Yet, you still try to make excuses to put me off. Are you really that afraid that I will eat you up?" Phoenix Rain smiled brightly, revealing a charming expression.

Watching Phoenix Rain act in such a way, even Shi Feng felt his willpower faltering.

She really is deserving her title as the Demon Queen, Shi Feng inwardly sighed.

If anyone else stood in his place right now, Phoenix Rain might have conquered them already.

Although Phoenix Rain appeared charming and gentle on the surface, her beauty and melodic voice capable of even toppling cities and countries, Shi Feng knew just how terrifying the woman was.

If anyone dared write her off as a pinup, they must suffer some sort of brain damage.

Even the insufferably arrogant Nine Dragons Emperor feared Phoenix Rain.

After pretending to hesitate repeatedly, Shi Feng finally slapped his thigh and said, "Alright, then. I agree to your proposal. However, if the conditions you state are, in any way, unfavorable to Zero Wing or the Candlelight Trading Firm, I can only apologize to you in advance."

"I knew Guild Leader Black Flame would be a pleasant person to work with!" Phoenix Rain hurriedly said. "However, I don't want others to know about this matter; only you and I are allowed to know. May we move to a more private location?"

"Okay, follow me, then."

Saying so, Shi Feng led Phoenix Rain to a VIP reception room. The room offered luxury and comfort. Moreover, it was also not possible for others to listen in on their conversation.

Chapter 565 - The Offer

The VIP reception room on the second floor was like an entirely different world.

The rich fragrance of flowers and the chirping of birds filled the room. One could also see green mountains and blue creeks in the distance. The space inside this room looked just like the garden in paradise.

“As expected of a 2-star Shop. It actually offers such an impressive location,” Phoenix Rain expressed her admiration as she surveyed her surroundings.

“If Phoenix Pavilion Master likes it, you can easily obtain one for yourself. Although a 1-star Shop has less space and available environments to choose from, this garden environment is also available in a 1-star Shop,” Shi Feng laughed.

God’s Domain was not considered a different world without reason.

While nearly everything that could be found in the real world existed in God’s Domain, things that did not exist in the real world could also be found here.

In God’s Domain, the available activities were not limited to just killing monsters and leveling up. They could also enjoy a leisurely life here.

However, the extremely realistic sensations that God’s Domain offered was not its most attractive aspect. Instead, it was the time dilation.

This was the greatest scientific creation of mankind in this century, and only God’s Domain had managed to implement this function. No other virtual reality game had achieved this feat. This was also the main reason for God’s Domain’s popularity.

The flow of time in God’s Domain was twice as slow as that in the real world. In other words, God’s Domain’s players could theoretically live twice as long as ordinary people in the real world. Moreover, activities such as learning, relaxation, and resting could all be done in God’s Domain. People could have more time to do what they wished inside the game world.

In the real world, there were only 24 hours in a single day. An ordinary student like Shi Feng would normally commit five or six hours of their day to study. Sleep also occupied roughly nine hours. After deducting the time spent eating and other necessary activities to sustain one's life, a student like Shi Feng would only have around five or six hours of free time.

Meanwhile, each day in God's Domain had 48 hours!

In other words, a student in God's Domain could possibly have up to 30 hours of free time, five times that of ordinary people. Who wouldn't want to live such a life? Not to mention, the Main God System was constantly expanding the world of God's Domain, allowing this virtual world to become more realistic, interesting, and mysterious. Who wouldn't be tempted by something like this?

"Guild Leader Black Flame must be joking. Although I really wish to obtain a house like this for myself, unfortunately, Ordinary Shops are no good. Such an environment is only available in Luxury Shops. Meanwhile, constructing a Luxury Shop requires 1,000 Gold. I already wish I could spend 1,000 Gold as if it were 2,000, so where would I possibly find so much money laying around to construct a Luxury Shop?" Phoenix Rain shook her head, a hint of disappointment flashing in her eyes as she surveyed the room's elegance.

Even large Guilds had their own troubles to face.

A small Guild had few members, so it was relatively easy to manage. Thus, the Guild required less money to sustain it. On the other hand, it was extremely complex to manage a large Guild that had a large number of members. A super-first-rate Guild like the Dragon-Phoenix Pavilion was even more frightening. There were many aspects that required money. It was especially true during the initial stages of the game. It was like investing into a bottomless pit.

Fortunately, Guild Residences allowed the Pavilion to earn some money through Guild Quests. In addition, the trading firms and the raiding teams that had already taken shape had also begun to profit the Pavilion, allowing them to invest less as a result.

However, in terms of extravagance, no one throughout all of God's Domain could compete with the Candlelight Trading Firm.

"Phoenix Pavilion Master, nobody will be able to listen in on our conversation here. You should be able to state your condition now, right?" Although Phoenix Rain had presented herself weak all this time, Shi Feng refused to believe that the woman was as simple as she made herself out to be. For just one simple condition, she had personally run all the way from the Black Dragon Empire to White River City and had even gifted him an Epic Treasure Chest.

"Before I reveal it, I hope that you will first sign this confidentiality contract," Phoenix Rain said. She then revealed a contract that she had prepared, placing it on the table. Quite seriously, she said, "It is not that I do not believe Guild Leader Black Flame, but this matter is simply too important to take risks. If a third party discovered this situation, it would not benefit either of us."

Shi Feng picked up the contract and gave it a careful read. Indeed, it was a very common confidentiality contract.

Under the surveillance of the Main God System, it was impossible to reveal any secrets covered by a confidentiality contract in the game. Of course, the Main God System could not control any leaks in the real world.

"Aren't you afraid that I will reveal it outside of God's Domain?" Shi Feng asked.

"I believe that Guild Leader Black Flame is an intelligent person, so please don't ask such a foolish question," Phoenix Rain said, her hand covering her mouth as she chuckled softly.

"It was just a joke." Shi Feng then signed the contract.

The moment Shi Feng finished his signature, the notification sound of the system immediately rang by his ears.

System: Contract established. If either party violates the contract, the violator will be banished from God's Domain.

Although the system's female voice sounded crisp and pleasing, its words would give anyone goosebumps.

Banished from God's Domain. Moreover, there was only one condition. Any player who wished to live in God's Domain would not dare violate this condition.

After hearing the system notification, Phoenix Rain smiled at Shi Feng as she said, "In reality, my condition is very simple. I just wish to obtain a portion of the Candlelight Trading Firm's shares, but in my own name, not the Phoenix Pavilion's and, even more so, not the Dragon-Phoenix Pavilion's.

"Of course, I will provide even more benefits. The simplest would be Land for Shops. You should know that Reputation is required to purchase a good plot of Land in every city. Although one can obtain it through sub-sales, the strategic plots of Land in every city are not something an ordinary Guild can obtain easily. Currently, Zero Wing might have secured the best plots of Land available in Star-Moon Kingdom's two largest cities, what about the important cities in other countries?

"If the Candlelight Trading Firm is to grow, it will require a larger market. I am sure that you will not be satisfied with just ruling over these two cities, right?

“I can provide this convenience. I can allow the Candlelight Trading Firm to obtain the valuable plots of Land available in the main cities of many kingdoms and empires. In addition, I also have plenty of connections that can enable you to obtain raw materials cheaply, as well as provide you with the forging designs and recipes obtainable from Dungeons. You won’t have to worry about collecting and purchasing these things yourself. Of course, this matter will be carried out discreetly. I will not reveal my involvement.

“More importantly, I am not your enemy. Nine Dragons Emperor might have a grudge against you, but I do not stand with him. To be more precise, I stand with you. May I know what Guild Leader Black Flame thinks of my proposal?”

At this moment, Shi Feng was silent.

Phoenix Rain’s proposal was indeed generous.

A super-first-rate Guild’s background was extraordinary. Compared to him, Phoenix Rain would have a much easier time obtaining the golden Lands of the major cities in the various kingdoms and empires. Moreover, it was also impossible for him to get players of other kingdoms to resell their Lands. Nobody would be so foolish as to give away their benefits to someone else, particularly to the Candlelight Trading Firm, a trading firm with massive advantages.

Moreover, just as Phoenix Rain had said, she was not his enemy.

On the surface, the Dragon-Phoenix Pavilion might seem like a single Guild, but in reality, the Pavilion was two Guilds joined as one. If not for that mysterious Great Pavilion Master maintaining the balance, the Dragon-Phoenix Pavilion might immediately break into two separate Guilds.

“How many shares do you want?” Shi Feng asked.

“Since it is I who have come in search of Guild Leader Black Flame for cooperation, I will leave that decision up to you!” Phoenix Rain giggled. “I believe that, after seeing my sincerity, based on Guild Leader Black Flame’s personality and reputation, you will not take advantage of this young lady, right?”

Chapter 566 - Epic Treasure Chest Secured

Shi Feng fell silent upon hearing Phoenix Rain’s words.

Negotiations were normal when one sought cooperation, and people would normally strive to obtain the greatest benefits for themselves.

This might seem like a smart move, but contrary to popular belief, it placed one at a disadvantage. As neither side knew the other party’s bottom line, the one to make the first offer would reveal their bottom line to their opponent.

Moreover, after Phoenix Rain had said as much, how could he possibly take advantage of her?

Even after a long moment, Shi Feng did not answer. However, Phoenix Rain was not anxious in the slightest. On the contrary, she leisurely admired the scenery.

“Twenty percent. What do think?” Shi Feng finally said after pondering for some time.

“Twenty percent?” Phoenix Rain was stunned, looking at Shi Feng as if saying, “Are you kidding me?”

The connections the Dragon-Phoenix Pavilion possessed were exactly what the trading firm needed most, as having a wide range of connections meant that more people would purchase the trading firm’s products. Not to mention, the Candlelight Trading Firm would also get its hands on a large supply of raw materials, recipes, and forging designs. These were items that a trading firm lacked the most.

Currently, although the Candlelight Trading Firm’s range of influence had grown quite wide, it only had control over two truly useful cities. One was White River City, while the other was Star-Moon City. If the Candlelight Trading Firm worked with her, it could spread its influence to dozens of major cities. The profit it could rake in at that time would surpass its current income dozens of times.

Meanwhile, the only things the Candlelight Trading Firm could offer in this cooperation was Coins and products such as the Intermediate Mana Armor Kits, Light Stones, and Basic Strengthened Armor Kits. Aside from that, there was nothing special about the Candlelight Trading Firm.

Yet, Shi Feng had only offered her 20% of the Firm’s shares.

Normally, anyone else would willingly offer 50%, or even 60%, of the Firm’s shares.

“That’s right, 20%. This is the most that I can offer. If you cannot accept this amount, we can let it go at that,” Shi Feng said earnestly.

Phoenix Rain did not know that, before this, Shi Feng’s offer to Gentle Snow was only 15% of Zero Wing’s shares. Moreover, this included the annexation of Ouroboros. Although Phoenix Rain could provide far more connections than Ouroboros, currently, such things were unnecessary to Shi Feng.

Cooperating with Phoenix Rain would provide him with a massive advantage during the early stages of the game. However, at its core, a trading firm relied not on connections, but on the products it sold.

To become iron, the metal itself must be strong.

Take the Overwhelming Trading Firm for example. Even though it possessed more connections than the Candlelight Trading Firm, so what?

If not for the Flame Dragon Potion, the Overwhelming Trading Firm would have long since lost its competitive edge.

As long as a trading firm possessed a product unique to itself, there was no need to fear a lack of customers.

For example, if the Candlelight Trading Firm sold an Epic item, even players from other kingdoms and empires would willingly foot the exorbitant teleportation fee to visit the Trading Firm.

Most importantly, the Candlelight Trading Firm possessed an advantage that no other trading firm possessed, and that was the Special Workshops available only in 2-star Shops or above. With these Workshops, the Candlelight Trading Firm could nurture a large number of Forgers and other Lifestyle players. Not only was this method efficient, but it was also cost-efficient.

Although it was a good thing to have many connections, it would be meaningless if the trading firm could not keep up with production. It was like looking at a treasure chest that one could not obtain.

Both the Intermediate Mana Armor Kits and the Fire Dragon Potions had very low production volumes. The number of people that could actually purchase them was very low. The main reason behind the Candlelight Trading Firm's triumph over the Overwhelming Trading Firm was mainly the common product known as Light Stones.

Phoenix Rain's offer was only icing on the cake. The fact that Shi Feng was willing to offer her 20% of the Candlelight Trading Firm's shares was entirely because of the future development potential between them, not because of the immediate profits.

"Guild Leader Black Flame really is confident in the Candlelight Trading Firm. If so, I am relieved." Phoenix Rain smiled as she said, "Alright, then. Since I was the one who told Guild Leader Black Flame to make the offer, I won't go back on my word. If it's only 20%, so be it. When the time comes, I will send someone discreet to contact you. In addition, I will also send you reports on the cities of other kingdoms and empires. If Guild Leader Black Flame wishes to develop further in whichever city or require certain items, you can notify that person. That person will handle everything for you."

Following which, the two signed a contract to seal the deal.

Phoenix Rain's decisiveness had surprised Shi Feng slightly.

"Phoenix Pavilion Master, don't you feel that you are suffering a loss here?" Shi Feng asked, laughing.

Any normal person would undoubtedly refuse such a seemingly harsh offer. They would choose to develop their own trading firm instead. At the very least, they would be in control of said trading firm. However, even after his firm statement, Phoenix Rain had accepted the offer without hesitation.

"A loss?" Phoenix Rain shook her head. With an innocent gaze, she said, "I don't feel that way at all because I can tell that you, Guild Leader Black Flame, feel yourself suffering an even greater loss."

“To put it bluntly, even though I have clearly offered you such benefits, you still don’t seem to care all that much and have offered me such a low price. The only reason I can think of for such a reaction is that the Candlelight Trading Firm is still hiding some secret that I do not know of, and that its true value is much higher than what I have offered you today. In that case, shouldn’t I be even more accepting of your offer?”

Phoenix Rain’s words left Shi Feng completely speechless.

She was truly deserving her title as the Demon Queen. With her existence, it was no wonder why even Super Guilds had acknowledged the Dragon-Phoenix Pavilion’s status.

After Phoenix Rain quietly left...

Shi Feng looked at the Epic Treasure Chest left behind by Phoenix Rain, a grin appearing on his face.

He was fully capable of opening the Epic Treasure Chest.

Throughout this transaction, no matter how one looked at it, he was the one who had come out on top. If Phoenix Rain discovered this, she would certainly be disappointed.

“I wonder what kind of item I can get from an Epic Treasure Chest?” Shi Feng muttered, anticipation growing in his heart.

In his memories, he had never even heard of an Epic Treasure Chests. As for what he could obtain from one, he could only guess. Regardless of what item it was, it would be Epic ranked at the very least.

However, how could a single Epic item satisfy him? In order to reap the greatest benefit from this Epic Treasure Chest, Shi Feng decided not to open it immediately, but to wait.

The involvement of Luck when opening a treasure chest was too significant to ignore. Currently, Icarus's Heart was only Dark-Gold rank; it had yet to reach its evolution limit. Moreover, he was only a short distance from upgrading the necklace to Epic rank. With a little more time, he was confident that he could collect the remaining Life Force points required and upgrade the Icarus's Heart once more.

After all, Dark-Gold rank was only the standards of mortals. Meanwhile, Epic rank belonged to the extraordinary. There was a qualitative difference between the two. When the Icarus's Heart reached Epic rank, it would provide far more Luck.

His wisest option was to open the Epic Treasure Chest at that time.

The first thing he needed to do was collect plenty of Magic Crystals.

The Magic Crystals required to produce eighty-eight Mana Stones was no small number. Not to mention, there was also the Divine Colosseum, which would reveal itself in the future; that place was a bottomless pit meant for devouring Magic Crystals.

Following which, Shi Feng stored away the Epic Treasure Chest and left the VIP reception room. He then headed towards the Starstreak Trading Firm.

Originally, the Starstreak Trading Firm had been the most flourishing trading firm in White River City. However, with the rise of the Candlelight Trading Firm, the Starstreak Trading Firm's popularity had begun to roll downhill. Currently, the only reason that players still visited this place was to purchase some common products that only NPCs sold. Even so, the Starstreak Trading Firm still offered Shi Feng a lot of benefits.

An NPC had established the Starstreak Trading Firm. Including White River City, it had Shops in a total of eight cities. Moreover, unlike player-owned Shops, there was no city tax on the goods available in its Shops. Hence, Shi Feng still sold some advanced goods at the Starstreak Trading Firm, though that was only limited to the Shops located in cities without the Candlelight Trading Firm.

"Your Excellency Ye Feng, you've arrived," Anna, who was currently busy with work, hurriedly greeted Shi Feng when she saw him enter the President's Office.

"Yes, please notify President Henry and tell him that I have completed the task he entrusted me with." Shi Feng nodded in reply. He then said, "However, I want to change my remuneration."

Chapter 567 - Give or Take

As soon as Anna heard these words, she left the President's Office to invite President Henry over.

After watching Anna leave, Shi Feng examined the documents on the table.

These documents were the business listings of the Starstreak Trading Firm's purchases, shipments, and other such dealings. However, all of these dealings had been organized by Anna herself.

Anna was an NPC who possessed 91 Intelligence. Such NPCs were extremely rare in God's Domain. If she became a guard, her potential would be nearly limitless.

Hence, Shi Feng wished to negotiate with Henry.

The quests that NPCs commissioned were not without room for change. It only depended on whether or not the player involved possessed the strength to make such changes.

Previously, the reward they had agreed upon was a Tier 4 magic scroll that would allow him to reach the Dark Den easily and obtain the Bible of Darkness.

However, Shi Feng felt that something was amiss.

No matter how one looked at it, the task of managing the Starstreak Trading Firm was one part of an Epic Quest. The reward for completing it should not be limited to just the tool required to proceed to the next phase. If it were so, what's the difference between obtaining a reward and not obtaining one?

Thus, Shi Feng felt that he could fight for more as there might be some mysteries hidden within.

It was especially true for the assistant, Anna.

After the battle with the Dragon-Phoenix Pavilion, the various large Guilds in God's Domain had begun thinking of ways to obtain powerful NPC guards.

However, how could powerful guards possibly be that easy to find?

Take Anna for example. She was an extremely powerful guard. However, who would possibly believe that a weak and delicate young lady like her could become a guard with vast potential?

If Shi Feng had not accidentally looked at Anna's Attributes, he, too, would not have realized that she was so capable.

If he allowed Anna to become an Adventurer, with her Intelligence, she could reach astonishing heights. Although she would not be as powerful as Kite, she might still become a Fine-Gold ranked guard.

Dark-Gold ranked guards were legends in God's Domain. Based on Shi Feng's understanding, only a few people had managed to recruit Dark-Gold ranked guards in the past. The guards owned by the majority of the players in the game were Bronze or Mysterious-Iron rank. Even finding a Secret-Silver ranked guard was considered lucky, not to mention Fine-Gold rank.

Although a Fine-Gold ranked guard was not invincible against enemies of the same Tier and Level, it was still significantly stronger than monsters of the same Tier. Fighting players of the same Tier and Level would be even easier. Furthermore, Anna was a magical class.

The majority of the NPCs in God's Domain were physical classes; magical classes were very rare.

Magical classes were different from physical classes. They could not be used against Bosses and could only attack from the rear line.

To a Guild, however, a magical class's value far surpassed a physical class.

Magical class NPCs knew plenty of AOE spells and possessed strategic-level large-scale destruction spells. In a Guild War or against Field Bosses, these NPCs were frightening existences. Hence, the various large Guilds would usually prioritize magical class NPCs as their Personal Guards.

Because of this, on the market, the value of a Bronze ranked magical guard could rival even that of a Mysterious-Iron ranked physical guard.

If Anna were a Fine-Gold ranked magical guard, she would be no less valuable than Kite.

"No matter what, I must obtain Anna." Shi Feng grew excited just thinking about it.

As a Viscount, he only had two slots for Personal Guards. If he could fill those slots with a Dark-Gold ranked physical guard and a Fine-Gold ranked magical guard... A combination like that would have scared people to death in his past life.

With the presence of these two Personal Guards, defeating a Field Boss of the same Tier would be an effortless task.

After Shi Feng had waited in the magnificent and grand President's Office for some time, the dignified and elegant President Henry entered the room.

However, behind President Henry was a Level 180 Tier 3 Berserker.

Shi Feng could not help but frown slightly.

Whether it was among players or NPCs, a Tier 3 class was considered a big shot. In White River City, such an NPC would be at the same level as an overlord.

Although the Starstreak Trading Firm was one of White River City's top trading firms, it definitely could not afford to hire a Level 180 Berserker King as a guard.

"Your Excellency Ye Feng, you have truly surprised me. I did not expect that you would actually complete this quest so quickly!" Henry chuckled. "Here, allow me to introduce you. This man beside me is the Berserker King Schneider. He is an expert our trading firm has invited from Star-Moon City to annihilate the Black Scorpion Corps."

"Greetings, Your Majesty Schneider, I am Ye Feng, an Adventurer," Shi Feng introduced himself.

In response, however, Schneider only glanced at Shi Feng without saying a word. He showed no signs of being interested in Shi Feng's acquaintance.

However, Shi Feng was not bothered by Schneider's reaction. In truth, NPCs in God's Domain were largely similar to real humans. A Tier 3 Berserker King NPC like Schneider was considered a powerful force in a city like White River City. On the other hand, Shi Feng was only a Tier 1 player. In Schneider's eyes, he was no different than an ant.

Humans would not speak to ants. Schneider's attitude towards Shi Feng was normal.

In the past, while Shi Feng had been working on a quest, even though he was a Tier 3 Sword King, a Tier 4 NPC had robbed him. One could say that Shi Feng had long since grown accustomed to such behavior.

Of course, if Shi Feng were currently a Tier 3 player, Schneider would not be treating him so coldly.

In the past virtual reality games, NPCs had always felt distant, detached. It felt as if NPCs and players lived in two different worlds. However, the NPCs of God's Domain were different; they were extremely lifelike. If a player treated these NPCs as stupid and useless objects, then these NPCs would grant said player the full experience of passing through hell.

"May I know what Your Excellency wishes to discuss with me?" Henry asked, not paying any heed to Shi Feng and Schneider's exchange.

"I want to make a deal with you," Shi Feng stated. Laughing, he continued, "While I have been responsible for managing the Starstreak Trading Firm, Anna has helped me significantly. It was only because of her that I have lived up to your expectations and reached the goal of earning 30,000 Gold. Hence, I now wish to recruit Miss Anna as my personal assistant. Naturally, I am willing to pay the appropriate price.

"Aside from the 30,000 Gold you have requested, I am willing to offer an additional 3,000 Gold. May I know what you think of this offer?"

Anna, who stood beside Shi Feng, was stunned, her delicate mouth parting as she stared at Shi Feng in disbelief. The advanced NPCs working at the trading firm only made a monthly salary of several Gold. Yet, Shi Feng had offered 3,000 Gold to poach her.

Anna wasn't the only person who was shocked. Even Schneider, who had paid Shi Feng no mind, was awestruck.

As a Tier 3 Berserker King, he had only been offered 1,000 Gold to deal with the Black Scorpion Corps. That was enough to allow him to purchase an Epic item to increase his strength. Naturally, if he could recover the Starstreak Trading Firm's stolen merchandise, he could earn a bonus. Even then, however, he would not earn as much as 3,000 Gold.

At this moment, Schneider no longer looked at Shi Feng as if he were an ant; his gaze towards the layer had softened.

Henry squinted his eyes as he evaluated Shi Feng carefully.

After a short moment, he sighed, smiling as he said, "Your Excellency Ye Feng, it is not that I do not wish to let Anna go, but our Starstreak Trading Firm simply cannot do without Anna. Just like how Your Excellency has taken a liking to Anna's talent, it is only because of her that the Starstreak Trading Firm has its position today. Please forgive me for refusing your offer."

"Five thousand Gold!" Shi Feng made a new offer without hesitation.

To NPCs, this was an astronomical price.

Such an amount of money was sufficient for the Starstreak Trading Firm to hire several hundred advanced NPCs.

"This... won't do. As you can see, Anna is responsible for so much daily profit. For the sake of the trading firm, I am afraid I cannot accept your offer," Henry said, his expression revealing his struggle.

Merchants were all about profits!

This held true in both the real world and the virtual world.

“Six thousand Gold. I won’t go any higher. If you still refuse my offer, I can only choose to hire Mister Schneider beside you and have him take Anna’s contract for me by force,” Shi Feng said as he looked at Schneider, grinning.

Chapter 568 - Epic Ranked Tool

The moment Shi Feng said these words, Schneider’s eyes suddenly glowed. It was obvious that the Berserker King was tempted.

The Starstreak Trading Firm had only offered him 1,000 Gold as remuneration for getting rid of the Black Scorpion Corps. However, the Captain of the Black Scorpion Corps was a Tier 3 expert. It would not be easy for him to secure a victory. Not to mention, the Captain of the Black Scorpion Corps also had plenty of underlings.

On the other hand, taking a single contract from the President of the Starstreak Trading Firm would be child’s play, and the remuneration he would obtain was six times what the Starstreak Trading Firm had offered him.

Sure enough, there is room for negotiation in this quest.

Seeing Schneider's tempted gaze, Shi Feng knew that he was in for a show.

As one part of an Epic Quest, how could the final reward possibly be limited to a ticket leading to the next phase of the quest?

Moreover, a Tier 3 NPC would be considered a big shot in whichever city they visited. Such a character would not appear in a small place like the Starstreak Trading Firm for no good reason.

At this moment, Henry could no longer remain calm. Hurriedly, he said, "Your Excellency Ye Feng must be joking. Since you are so sincere, I believe that Anna will have a better future if she follows Your Excellency."

After Henry agreed, he immediately took out Anna's contract.

Shi Feng also handed over 36,000 Gold without hesitation. This was all of the capital currently in his possession.

If not for the Candlelight Trading Firm and Guild Residence earning him quite a lot of money these past few days, he would not have had so many Coins. After this transaction, he was a pauper once more.

However, Shi Feng did not mind.

Coins were meant to be spent. Otherwise, by the time players reached higher levels, the value of Gold would depreciate. Moreover, this exchange had been a bargain. After all, he had only spent 6,000 Gold to obtain a possible Fine-Gold ranked guard.

In the past, even Mysterious-Iron ranked physical guards went for over a thousand Gold; the price was equivalent to an Epic item of average quality. If it were a Secret-Silver physical guard, that price would multiply by tenfold, reaching over 10,000 Gold.

Meanwhile, the cost for a Secret-Silver magical guard would multiply by another ten. In other words, the value of a Secret-Silver ranked magical guard was at least 100,000 Gold. Even so, the supply of Secret-Silver magical guards was practically nonexistent. Anyone who discovered such guards would keep them for their own. Nobody would be so foolish as to give a Secret-Silver magical guard away, to say nothing of Fine-Gold ranked guards.

After Shi Feng obtained Anna's contract, the sound of a system notification rang out by his ears.

System: Anna's Favorability towards you has increased by 30 points.

"Your Excellency Ye Feng, this is the Tier 4 magic scroll that President Henry promised you," Anna said as she revealed a tattered scroll surrounded by a flashing purple glow.

Although the scroll looked worn, the magic power contained within caused even Schneider, a Tier 3 Berserker King, to palpitate with fear.

There was even less of a need to mention Shi Feng, who was only a Tier 1 Blade Saint.

The power within a Tier 4 magic scroll was the equivalent of a full-powered blow from a Tier 4 class. It could easily and heavily injure a Tier 4 class. It could even wound a Tier 5 class, not to mention Tier 3 classes or ant-like Tier 1 classes.

A magic scroll that has survived through the ancient times is extraordinary. It can practically rival the strength of an Epic item.

After receiving the scroll, Shi Feng examined the item. Immediately, he discovered just how powerful this Tier 4 magic scroll was.

Shi Feng had seen plenty of Tier 3 magic scrolls and had also used many before. However, this was his first time seeing a Tier 4 magic scroll.

Normally, magic scrolls were Consumable items; they would become useless after one use. However, this magic scroll that had been passed down from ancient times could be used multiple times.

But there was a limit to how many times it could be used and conditions for each use.

[Position Teleportation Scroll] (Tier 4 Magic Scroll)

Allows player to move to any desired location (Unable to teleport to certain special locations). Can be used a maximum of ten times. After each usage, requires five Mana Stones to replenish the scroll's magic power.

Cooldown: 3 days

(Current uses 0/10)

Ten uses... In other words, it was the equivalent of having ten Tier 4 Position Teleportation Scrolls. This magic scroll was even more valuable than an ordinary Epic item.

With this scroll, I can access areas that can't be reached with my current Level. Shi Feng stored the Position Teleportation Scroll with a satisfied expression, overjoyed.

As a reincarnator, he knew many secret locations throughout God's Domain. Only, he could not reach those locations due to the limitations of his current Level.

However, with this Position Teleportation Scroll, he could easily travel to those secret areas that hid boundless treasures.

God's Domain was massive. The higher level a map was, the fewer teleportation magic arrays it would have. As for locations with bountiful opportunities and treasures, there were practically no teleportation arrays there. Players had to rely on their own two feet to reach these maps.

God's Domain's Hidden Maps were an example. The system map would not display these areas, and players had to uncover these secrets on their own.

Every secret location was a huge treasure trove. It was the equivalent of a large Field Dungeon.

A Guild could raise its strength swiftly in these maps. Hence, scrambles over such secret locations had frequently happened in Shi Feng's previous life. There were also many Guilds that had risen to prominence due to these secret locations.

However, it was not easy to travel to a secret location as one would encounter many dangers on their journey. Even an elite team had a high chance of facing complete annihilation, not to mention ordinary players. Only when players exceeded the Level of these maps could they adventure to some low-level treasured lands.

Meanwhile, with the Position Teleportation Scroll, Shi Feng could teleport directly to his target. Although he would still face plenty of danger after arriving, he would face significantly less than he would by traveling there on foot.

After completing the quest, Shi Feng did not hurry to complete the final phase of the Epic Quest Darkness Descends. Instead, he led Anna to the Adventurer's Association.

If players wished to recruit an NPC to serve as their guard, the NPC first needed an Adventurer class.

However, most of the NPCs in God's Domain were ordinary people. They did not possess an Adventurer class at all. Hence, if players wished to recruit such NPCs as their guards, they needed these NPCs to register at the Adventurer's Association. At the same time, they were also required to select a specific class for these NPCs, allowing them to learn and train to become an Adventurer. Only then could these NPCs become a player's guards.

At this time, Shi Feng entered the Adventurer's Association's main hall. Despite it being daytime right now, there was still a large number of players present. A simple glance told Shi Feng that there were several hundred players here.

Of course, these players had not come to the Adventurer's Association because they had too much time on their hands.

They had all come here specifically for their NPC guards.

Due to Zero Wing's famous battle, many players had discovered a never-before-seen road to success. Even if their personal strength was lacking, they could nurture a guard to improve their own strength.

If a player wanted to recruit a Personal Guard, they had to become a Baron in their city first. They would then obtain one slot to recruit a Personal Guard.

However, a lot of time was required to become a Baron, and many players could not wait that long. Hence, they would first look for some NPCs they thought highly of and try to deepen their relationship with these NPCs. That way, by the time their Reputation reached a sufficient amount, they could immediately reach out to these NPCs and recruit them as their guards.

In God's Domain, the higher tiered an NPC was, the more difficult it would be for a player to deepen their relationship with said NPC.

Of all the NPCs in God's Domain, ordinary civilians were the easiest to form a relationship with.

However, it was not easy for the inhabitants of God's Domain to become Adventurers. If a player could help an ordinary civilian become an Adventurer, their relationship with said NPC would deepen significantly. Fortunately, players had that ability. Only, whether an NPC was actually capable of becoming an Adventurer depended on their own potential and Attributes, and this was information that players had no access to.

In addition, players had a limited number of recommendations per week. After using up their recommendations, they had to wait another week before their chances refreshed.

Therefore, when choosing ordinary NPCs, a player's foresight was extremely important.

If a player was unlucky, they could only search for other NPCs. If they were lucky, then they could begin deepening their relationship with said NPC earlier.

"There sure are a lot of people here." Shi Feng could not help but laugh bitterly when he saw the long line of over a hundred players.

This could be considered a form of digging his own grave, right?

Chapter 569 - SSS Rank

The Adventurer's Association's review of an NPC's ability to become an Adventurer was a tedious one.

The first evaluation was of the NPC-in-question's various Attributes, followed by a test for the NPC's suitability of the various classes. Only after these two tests were complete could the Adventurer's Association determine whether an NPC was suited to become an Adventurer or not.

In total, each NPC's review lasted roughly two minutes.

Watching players happily enter the testing room with their chosen NPCs and leave in tears made many of the players in line grow anxious.

“Isn’t the success rate a little too low? Out of the twenty people I have seen enter the testing room, only one came out with a successful result. And even then, the strength of that person’s NPC was only mediocre. It really makes you wonder how Zero Wing managed to obtain such a powerful NPC,” a male Cleric with a pointed nose said, sighing.

“It is possible that Zero Wing recruited an NPC who was already an Adventurer, to begin with. My teammates had already come here to recommend their own NPCs. However, only three of the chosen NPCs became Adventurers, though they received low ratings. They don’t really have any significant potential,” a burly male Berserker complained. “Unfortunately, nobody on my team is even a Baron, so we can’t recruit any guards or see the NPCs’ exact data. We can only confirm their standards based on the evaluation. I heard that the best guard Overwhelming Smile has managed to recruit is only Mysterious-Iron rank. I wonder if the NPC I that spent more than half a day searching for will become an Adventurer? If it’s a success, I’ll make a fortune.”

The players queuing up to have their chosen NPCs tested discussed Zero Wing’s guard, Kite. They all hoped that they could luck out and encounter an NPC like him as well. At that time, luxury cars and beautiful ladies would be within their grasp.

This was not an exaggeration.

The various large Guilds purchased powerful guards through the virtual trade center at astronomical prices.

Even Bronze guards sold for 100 Gold or so, whereas Mysterious-Iron guards sold for 500 Gold. As for Secret-Silver rank, the price would multiply by tenfold. If those Coins were converted to Credits, it was enough to allow an ordinary person to live the rest of their lives without working. However, even now, no one had offered any Mysterious-Iron guards for sale, much less Secret-Silver.

A moment later, a Ranger left the testing room with an excited expression. Loudly flaunting to his own party members, he said, “Hahaha! Let’s head to the Rose Bar! I’ll treat everyone to a cup of Icefire Wine!”

Rose Bar was one of White River City's high-class bars. Meanwhile, the Icefire Wine was a must-try drink, and it was extremely popular among players. However, the drink was not cheap, with each cup costing 10 Silver. Even elite players only occasionally ordered a cup to sate their addiction. If they drank a cup every day, they would become a pauper very quickly.

"Sure, but what was your test result?" one of the Ranger's teammates asked curiously.

"My NPC can become an Adventurer. Moreover, he even obtained a B-rank rating for the Shield Warrior's evaluation! They say he'll become a powerful Shield Warrior in the future!" the Ranger boasted.

"Lucky! This is by far the highest rating I've heard of! Our party's success will rely on you in the future!" an Elementalist said excitedly.

The watching crowd looked at the Ranger enviously when they heard about his NPC's B-rank.

They could not help but wish they could snatch the Ranger's chosen NPC for themselves.

Unfortunately, the Main God System had long since set it so that the NPCs that had been recommended by a player would receive protection. Within ten days, no other player could increase their Favorability with the NPC in question. Hence, it was not possible to steal an NPC from another player.

A period of ten days was enough to allow a player to deepen their relationship with an NPC significantly. If one worked hard, they could even accumulate sufficient Reputation and become a Baron.

Normally, in order for an NPC to become an Adventurer, they needed to receive a D-rank rating or higher on a particular class.

“B-rank rating?” Shi Feng could not help his surprise.

In truth, the evaluation given by the Adventurer’s Association’s test could not completely determine an NPC’s potential. It was only a rough estimation.

It was just like how one would receive a “Pass” on a test, but in reality, the passing mark for the test ranged between 60 and 100 marks. The same principle applied to the Adventurer’s Association’s test.

The test was very general, so the final results would not always be accurate. It could only determine the upper limit of an NPC’s potential, not their actual potential.

Normally, NPCs that received a D-rank would end up a Common guard with limited Growth Potential. These NPCs were not worth the time it took to nurture them as Personal Guards. Only D-rank NPCs who were specialized in certain Attributes could become Bronze guards. However, the chances of finding those NPCs were very low.

In other words, a D-rank NPC’s potential ranged between Common and Bronze rank. However, only after these NPCs became guards would one know their exact Growth Potential.

Meanwhile, C-rank NPCs could become Mysterious-Iron guards.

As for B-rank NPCs, they had a strong chance of becoming Bronze guards and a certain probability to become Mysterious-Iron guards. There was also a relatively good chance for B-rank NPCs to become Secret-Silver guards. Unless one had somehow offended the Main God System in their previous lives, there was almost no chance for a B-rank NPC to end up a Common guard.

Of course, A-rank stood above B-rank.

Extremely few NPCs would receive this rating. Even in his previous life, Shi Feng had never personally encountered an NPC who had received an A-rank.

An NPC with an A-rank was a dragon or phoenix among men.

As for an A-rank NPC's potential range, it was between Bronze and Fine-Gold rank.

In the past, out of all the NPCs he had recommended, the highest rating he had obtained was B-rank. After recruiting said NPC as his guard, he, fortunately, had ended up with a Secret-Silver guard.

This time, however, Shi Feng already knew Anna's Base Attributes. Based on his guards' Attributes in his previous life, Shi Feng was sure that Anna would receive a very high rating.

"Lord Viscount, I apologize for the long wait. Please, follow me," the test officer said respectfully after glancing at Shi Feng.

A Viscount was already a Grand Noble in White River City. They were far more powerful than ordinary nobles. Not only could they recruit 50 ordinary guards, but they also had two slots for Personal Guards.

Shi Feng nodded and followed the test officer into the testing room.

“Lord Viscount, based on the Adventurer’s Association’s rules, each test will cost you 10 Silver. As my lord is a Viscount of White River City, you can enjoy a 20% discount, so my lord only needs to pay 8 Silver per test,” the test officer explained uneasily as he arrived before the test apparatus.

“Here.” Shi Feng readily handed over 8 Silver Coins, inwardly cursing the Adventurer’s Association.

Magic Crystals powered the test apparatus. How much was a Magic Crystal worth on the market? Moreover, each Magic Crystal could be used dozens of times. Yet, the Adventurer’s Association charged 10 Silver for every test.

In other words, the Adventurer’s Association earned a profit of dozens of times the actual cost. It was far more profitable than any other industry.

However, it was due to the fact players were required to spend money on many aspects of the game that allowed the Coins of God’s Domain to remain extremely rare and valuable.

Following which, Anna walked up to the test apparatus and began her potential evaluation.

Time seemed to crawl by. However, even after two full minutes had passed, the test apparatus had yet to produce a conclusion. On the contrary, due to the test apparatus consuming too much power, the test officer had no choice but to replace the Magic Crystal powering it.

One crystal... Two crystals...

In the end, Anna's test used a total of five Magic Crystals. At this moment, the test officer had also turned pale.

Meanwhile, the result displayed showed that Anna was suited to become a Summoner, and her rating for the class was SSS-rank!

Chapter 570 - Black Wizard

Although the cost of five Magic Crystals had turned the test officer's complexion a sickly shade of green, the lost Magic Crystals were of little importance compared to the final results of the evaluation.

"Is the test apparatus broken?" The test officer hurriedly began checking the test apparatus.

SSS-rank rating... This was a rating never before seen in the history of White River City. Not even in the entire Star-Moon Kingdom had there ever been someone with an SSS-rank.

Isn't the apparatus exaggerating the result a little too much?! Shi Feng was similarly skeptical.

Based on what he remembered of his past life, even a decade after God's Domain's launch, there had never been an NPC who had received an SSS-rank. The maximum rating known to players was S-rank, and one could count such occurrences with their fingers.

After an A-rank NPC officially became a guard, there was a possibility for them to become a Dark-Gold guard. However, the probability of this happening was so low that it was negligible.

Only NPCs with S-rank ratings had a decent chance of becoming a Dark-Gold guard.

Back when the first S-rank rating NPC appeared, the news had shaken God's Domain, and many apex characters had fought fiercely to obtain said NPC.

There was a 100% probability to nurture a Dark-Gold guard into a Tier 5 class. If one were willing to pay the price, there was even a possibility to nurture said NPC into a Tier 6 God-ranked guard.

Back then, Tier 5 players were as rare as a phoenix's feather, not to mention Tier 6 God-ranked players.

If a Tier 5 player emerged in a Guild, it would not be strange to see the Guild to celebrate for three days and three nights, not to mention obtaining a Tier 5 Personal Guard. A Tier 5 NPC was much stronger than a normal Tier 5 player.

First of all, there was the difference in Attributes. In the absence of any equipment, the Base Attributes of an NPC were significantly higher than a player's. The second reason was equipment.

In God's Domain, the equipment guards wore and that of players was different. Top-tier equipment for guards could be purchased from an NPC Shop, which included Epic Equipment and Set Equipment. If one were lucky, they could even purchase a piece of Fragmented Legendary Equipment. In other words, one could purchase top-tier equipment for a guard as long as one could afford it.

As for players?

Players had to expend a ton of effort just to obtain Dark-Gold Equipment, not to mention Epic or Fragmented Legendary Equipment.

Hence, as long as a Personal Guard became a Tier 5 class, their strength could immediately reach the peak of Tier 5. On the other hand, players had to obtain weapons, equipment, and other items that were suited to their Tier 5 classes, one piece at a time, slowly and gradually increase their strength.

If the public knew of Anna's SSS-rank, it would cause a sensation to sweep throughout the entire God's Domain.

"It seems that I have truly hit the jackpot this time," Shi Feng said as he looked at Anna, who currently wore a blank expression, laughing.

He only knew about the ratings reaching a maximum of S-rank. He had never heard anything about an SSS-rank. Such NPCs might have appeared in the past, but if the player involved did not reveal the information, who would know about it?

Moreover, a majority of the powerful guards in the past had not been ordinary NPCs. Instead, these guards were directly recruited from NPCs who already possessed a class or high-tiered NPCs.

After all, NPCs capable of reaching a high Tier were extraordinary in their own right; they would have vast Growth Potential, naturally. However, the higher tiered an NPC was, the more difficult it would be to recruit them. It would require a lot more time and effort.

Although Shi Feng did not know how high Anna's Growth Potential could reach, with an SSS-rank rating, at the very minimum, she should be a Fine-Gold guard.

After some time passed, the test officer was finally certain that nothing was wrong with the test apparatus, and he could not help but turn to look at Anna in shock. There were also hints of reverence in the test officer's gaze.

"Miss Anna, you are the first person in our White River City's history to obtain an SSS-rank. According to the rules of the Adventurer's Association, you are now an Honorary Elder of the association. We will prepare a suitable Epic Set Equipment as well as a Tier 1 Class Emblem for you. We will also dispatch a special instructor from the association to guide you. Please wait here for a moment." At this moment, the test officer addressed Anna with immense respect. He displayed even more humility in front of Shi Feng.

To NPCs, Shi Feng was merely a Grand Noble. However, as someone with an SSS-rank, Anna was destined to become a peerless powerhouse in the future, the overlord of an area. She even possessed the status of an Honorary Elder in the Adventurer's Association. No matter how one looked at it, Anna's status far surpassed Shi Feng's.

"Lord Viscount, as the referrer, the Adventurer's Association will also gift you a special reward. Please wait here for a moment as well." After saying so, the test officer rushed out of the testing room to contact the upper echelons of the Adventurer's Association.

Shi Feng then went to the VIP reception room next to the testing room.

Time passed little by little.

Players continued to enter and leave the testing room, one after another. Yet, despite very few players leaving with a smile, the stream of players arriving to recommend the NPC of their choice was endless.

“It would be great if I could obtain a test apparatus for myself.” Shi Feng watched the line of players enviously.

Compared to the money the Adventurer’s Association earned from conducting tests, the Candlelight Trading Firm only earned spare change.

However, the precondition to earn money via tests was to set up an Adventurer’s Association of his own.

Meanwhile, each city could only have one Adventurer’s Association. If players wished to construct an Adventurer’s Association of their own, they first needed to establish a town or city.

“After completing this quest, it should be about time to prepare.” Shi Feng began to consider establishing his own city.

If a large Guild wished to earn enough money to become self-sustaining, it needed its own territory.

A Guild Residence was not enough; the Guild would need a town.

This was also why, in the past, so many Guilds had fought each other to the bitter end. The profits a player-established city offered far exceeded anyone’s imagination.

Compared to the money one could earn from constructing their own city, the money one could earn from setting up a trading firm was nothing.

Only, it was extremely difficult for players to construct their own cities. Even if players succeeded, its defense was another big problem.

Although Shi Feng could not yet construct his own city, he could prepare to do so. That way, by the time his Guild possessed sufficient strength, he could establish a small city of his own swiftly.

Meanwhile, the biggest problem one would face when constructing a city was the various resources required. The manpower and material resources required could instantly bankrupt a first-rate Guild. This would be the case even for the current Zero Wing. Among the most important resources required were the forging designs for various buildings, magic array matrices, and so on.

Without these key items, even if Shi Feng managed to gather the required wood, stones, and other raw materials, he could only stare at them.

If he wanted to obtain these forging designs and magic array matrices, he would have to raid the dark forces and large-scale Team Dungeons throughout the continent of God's Domain.

Just as Shi Feng pondered about how he should go about procuring those forging designs, the heavy wooden doors of the reception room parted, and three NPCs walked in.

Of the three NPCs, one was the test officer, one was a black-clothed old man wearing a black felt hat, and the other was a proud and pretty lady dressed in luxurious robes.

The old man in black was a Level 200 Tier 4 Black Wizard with practically the same strength as White River City's Magistrate, Weissman. He was also one of the NPCs protecting White River City.

Meanwhile, the lady was a Level 180 Illusionist, a Tier 3 class of a Summoner.

Chapter 571 - Taboo

Both the Tier 3 Illusionist and the Tier 4 Black Wizard were NPCs at the very top of White River City.

With both of these great characters going out of their way to come here, one could see just how much importance the Adventurer's Association was placing on Anna.

"Who's the one who achieved an SSS-rank?" the Black Wizard Glynne asked.

"Association Master, Miss Anna has earned that rank," the test officer hurriedly said.

Glynne's glowing green eyes immediately began to size up Anna, who stood behind Shi Feng. Although Glynne's actions held no ill intent, Shi Feng could still feel an immense pressure from his gaze, his movements growing sluggish as a result.

If Shi Feng, a Tier 1 player, reacted in such a way, the pressure that an NPC, who had yet to become an Adventurer, felt would be even greater.

Yet, Anna showed no reaction as if she had not felt the pressure from Glynne at all.

“Sure enough, your concentration is extraordinary,” the Black Wizard Glynne laughed, satisfied. “We haven’t had a talent in White River City for many years now. I didn’t think that the next one would be so extraordinary. Irene, I’ll leave this little lady in your care. You are the strongest Summoner in our White River City’s Adventurer’s Association. If you fail to guide her properly, I will find you.”

“Association Master, please rest assured. I will nurture Anna with every resource I have,” the Tier 3 Illusionist Irene said, chuckling.

“Alright, show this little lady around the association and familiarize her with the place for now.” Glynne nodded as he caressed his white beard. He then looked at Shi Feng, saying, “You must be the brat who recommended the little lady, right?”

Shi Feng nodded silently.

The high-tiered NPCs of God’s Domain all possessed extremely high intelligence. As for Glynne, the Association Master of an Adventurer’s Association, he possessed intelligence that far surpassed even ordinary humans. Moreover, he also wielded immense authority in White River City. A single word for him could end Shi Feng’s career here.

Hence, before such an NPC, Shi Feng had to maintain a certain degree of humility.

If he dared to act conceited in front of an NPC like Glynne, he would suffer for it. In the past, only after countless players had gone down that route had they understood the importance of propriety.

“Since you have introduced such a genius to White River City, as the Association Master of White River City’s Adventurer’s Association, I will not be stingy with you. Since you are a Tier 1 Swordsman, this item should suit you. If you can master it, you will face fewer hardships on the road ahead,” Glynne said as he took out a gray book surrounded by an ancient aura.

The word “Taboo” graced the bottom-right corner of this old, gray book.

“Taboo Skill!” Shi Feng was stunned.

There were many Skills in God’s Domain. However, a majority of them were ordinary Skills; their might was only subpar, and they could not increase a player’s combat power significantly. Only those rare Skills could impact a player’s combat power.

For example, the Skills Shi Feng had learned such as Thundering Flash and Thunder Flame Explosion were rare Skills. These Skills allowed a player to fight an enemy that was slightly stronger than they were.

Meanwhile, sure-kill Skills were stronger than rare Skills. These Skills had the ability to instant-kill players of the same Level, changing the tide of battle. One such Skill was Shi Feng’s Flame Burst.

However, there was an even more powerful type of Skill that could allow players to threaten enemies that were stronger than themselves.

This type of Skill was known as a Taboo Skill.

The gray book Glynne had just revealed was a Skill Book for a Taboo Skill. A Taboo Skill even allowed players to challenge enemies of a higher tier.

The instant Shi Feng received the gray book, he inspected it.

[Instant Strike] (Tier 2 Taboo Skill)

Utilizing the power of thunder, instantly move in front of the target. For the next 3 seconds, Attack Speed increased by 500%, and each attack will deal 400% damage to the target and inflict the Serious Numbness effect. Instantly kill targets below 20% HP.

Cooldown: 1 hour

Class Restriction: Swordsman

Isn't he a little too generous? He actually gave me a Tier 2 Taboo Skill. Shi Feng was slightly surprised after reading the item description.

Taboo Skills were different from other Skills. They did not require Proficiency to upgrade, and players of any Level could learn them. Only, one needed to fulfill certain conditions before they could learn them. Taboo Skills were also categorized into different Tiers.

Tier 1 Taboo Skills were the most common, and only players who were Tier 1 or higher could display their maximum potential. The effects of a Tier 1 Taboo Skill could rival even an ordinary Tier 2 Skill.

Tier 2 Taboo Skills were slightly rarer, and only when players obtained their Tier 2 classes could they fully display the Skill's might. Their effects could rival a Tier 3 Skill.

Tier 3 Taboo Skills were extremely rare, and only a few players would actually get the chance to learn such a Skill. However, any Tier 3 players who learned such a Skill would struggle to find a worthy opponent among players of the same Tier because a Tier 3 Taboo Skill was just as strong as a Tier 4 Skill. Even a Tier 4 player would lose over half of their HP, not to mention Tier 3 players.

As for Tier 4 Taboo Skills, their rarity could rival even Legendary items.

Tier 5 Taboo Skills were little more than legend. If a Tier 5 player grasped such a Skill, they could even pose some threat to a Tier 6 God-ranked player. Hence, one could just imagine the rarity of a Tier 5 Taboo Skill.

Based on Shi Feng's knowledge, there had only been a single person who had learned a Tier 5 Taboo Skill throughout the entire God's Domain in the past. Back then, that person had become the most powerful player below Tier 6 God-ranked players as there was no Tier 5 player capable of defending against that person's Tier 5 Taboo Skill. In addition, that person's skills and equipment were top notch in God's Domain. Hence, he had been publicly acknowledged as the number one player beneath Tier 6.

Currently, players' average Level was only slightly over Level 20. The majority of players in God's Domain had not even obtained their Tier 1 classes yet.

Meanwhile, Shi Feng had obtained a Tier 2 Taboo Skill.

Even if he did not possess any Level or equipment advantages, with this Tier 2 Taboo Skill, it was still possible for him to instant-kill any enemies that were Tier 2 or below. Even if he couldn't kill them instantly, he could still inflict heavy damage. If he factored in his Level and equipment advantages, as

long as he managed to grasp this Taboo Skill, he would stand at the very peak of all Tier 2 classes. It was the same even if he stood against an NPC.

Of course, God's Domain was fair. If one wished to obtain great power, they first needed to pay the appropriate price.

Although Taboo Skills could increase a player's strength, the learning processes of Taboo Skills and ordinary Skills were different. Taboo Skills could not be learned by the click of a button.

One needed to train with a Taboo Skill.

That's right; they needed to train.

Players were required to learn the movements recorded in the Skill Book, and at the same time, fulfill the book's learning requirements. Most importantly, one needed to achieve a Completion Rate of 90% or above to learn the Taboo Skill.

Moreover, the higher a Taboo Skill's Tier was, the more difficult it would be to learn it. Some Taboo Skills were so difficult that even expert players could not learn them.

Hence, many players who had obtained Taboo Skills had complained about this in the past. However, there were even more players who gloated over their misfortune.

So what if you were lucky?

Even if you obtained a Tier 6 Taboo Skill, what would it matter if you couldn't learn it?

Due to this, Taboo Skills had become many players' heartache. In the past, many players had no choice but to trade with others for a lower tiered Taboo Skill after obtaining a high-tiered Taboo Skill. After all, there was no point to owning a high-tiered Taboo Skill if one could not learn it.

Fortunately, it is only a Tier 2 Taboo Skill. If it were a Tier 3 Taboo Skill, I would have no choice but to treat this thing as a decoration. Shi Feng was very satisfied with the Taboo Skill Instant Strike. As long as I learn this, I will have a much easier time when I go to the Dark Den.

In the past, the most powerful Taboo Skill Shi Feng had learned was a Tier 3 Taboo Skill. However, the price and time required for learning one were simply too high. The conditions were not something players at his current Level could meet.

However, even a Tier 2 Taboo Skill was extremely difficult for current players to learn.

Other than the fact that only Tier 2 classes or above were capable of displaying the full potential of a Tier 2 Taboo Skill, Tier 2 Taboo Skills were labeled as Tier 2 because Tier 2 or higher players had a much easier time learning them.

In the past, many Tier 3 players had only managed to learn a Tier 2 Taboo Skill after a lot of struggle. One could just imagine how difficult it was to grasp a Taboo Skill.

Soon, Shi Feng left the Adventurer's Association.

Currently, Anna was still a classless NPC. She would have to spend the next week building her foundations to become an Adventurer. Naturally, Shi Feng would not wait inside the Adventurer's Association for an entire week.

First and foremost, he needed to learn the Taboo Skill Instant Strike.

After Shi Feng returned to the Candlelight Trading Firm, without hesitation, he entered a private lounge and began studying the Skill Book.

"I wonder what the conditions are? Hopefully, they won't be too harsh."

Chapter 572 - 100% Completion Rate

Inside the quiet private lounge, Shi Feng impatiently opened the thick and heavy Skill Book.

The moment Shi Feng flipped to the first page of the book, the sound of a system notification rang out by his ears.

System: Do you wish to bind and learn this Skill Book? Reminder: Skill Book cannot be traded once bound.

Shi Feng immediately chose to bind the Skill Book to himself.

In the past, many players had bound a Taboo Skill to themselves without knowing the difficulty of the Taboo Skill they were about to learn, afraid that the Taboo Skill would suddenly grow legs and run away. However, such a rash decision had filled many players, who had obtained high-tiered Taboo Skills, with deep regret.

However, the Taboo Skill Shi Feng had right now was only Tier 2. Even if he failed to learn it now, he could try again once he became a Tier 2 class. He would not waste this valuable Taboo Skill.

After binding the Skill Book, the contents of the book finally appeared.

Shi Feng promptly began studying one word at a time.

Inside the Skill Book, other than some texts and pictorial introduction, there was a holographic video depicting the use of Instant Strike, which allowed players to grasp the techniques required to activate the Skill quickly.

Taboo Skills in God's Domain were similar to the spells used by magical classes in which they were very strict about their use.

When magical classes cast a spell, incantations and hand gestures were of the utmost importance, particularly when tracing runes. Only when these actions reached a certain Completion Rate could magical classes display great power.

Taboo Skills were the same. These Skills relied heavily on the accuracy and fluency of the player's footwork, body movements, and attack patterns. Even the slightest mistake could result in a failure to activate the Taboo Skill. Compared to casting spells, players were required to have far more delicate control over their own bodies. They needed a clear understanding of each and every motion that was involved.

Without realizing it, more than an hour had passed. Currently, Shi Feng was only halfway through the Skill Book. Any ordinary person would have long since begun to practice the Taboo Skill. However, Shi Feng was not in a hurry as he examined each page carefully.

After more than three hours, Shi Feng's heart suddenly sunk, and he frowned at the gray book.

"Skill Completion Rate must reach 95%... Moreover, I'll also need to absorb 100 Thunder Crystals from Thunder Beast Kings. Isn't this joke going a little too far?" A bitter laugh escaped Shi Feng's lips as he gazed at the Instant Strike Skill Book on the table.

Although he had known that a Tier 1 class could not easily learn a Tier 2 Taboo Skill, he had not expected the difficulty to be so high.

Shi Feng had learned a few Taboo Skills in the past, so he was quite knowledgeable on the topic.

Tier 1 Taboo Skills normally required players to achieve a 90% Completion Rate. To ordinary players, this alone would prevent them from ever learning a Tier 1 Taboo Skill. Even experts would require long periods of bitter training to achieve such a high Completion Rate. Not to mention, there were usually other conditions that needed to be fulfilled as well.

Tier 2 Taboo Skills normally required a Completion Rate of 93%.

Only at Tier 3 would a Taboo Skill require a 95% Completion Rate.

Yet, Instant Strike, as a Tier 2 Taboo Skill, required Shi Feng to achieve a 95% Completion Rate.

However, this was still not the largest challenge.

The point that had left Shi Feng truly speechless was the 100 Thunder Crystals that he needed to obtain through killing Thunder Beast Kings.

Shi Feng was very familiar with Thunder Beast Kings. These monsters inhabited a location not far from a Level 50, 100-man large-scale Team Dungeon. Thunder Beast Kings' fur was extremely valuable; it was a rare material that was required to produce equipment with the Lightning Resistance Attribute. The monster's meat was also a must-try delicacy. If cooked properly, it could become a gourmet meal that nobody could resist after a single taste.

Just a single piece of the Thunder Beast King's meat could sell for 3 Gold.

Hence, in the past, many players had tried to grind the Thunder Beast Kings to earn money.

However, a player had to be strong enough as Thunder Beast Kings could rival Tier 3 classes of the same Level. Even the weakest Thunder Beast King was a High Lord, while the majority of them were Great Lords. Even a large Guild had to pay an unimaginable price if they wanted to kill a Field Great Lord, not to mention independent players.

Meanwhile, Thunder Crystals were treasures that the Thunder Beast Kings hid within their bodies. However, the drop-rate was not 100%.

Instant Strike required 100 Thunder Crystals. Even if Shi Feng sold off Zero Wing, he could not purchase so many Thunder Crystals.

Shi Feng was also only Level 32 at the moment. He was still a fair distance from reaching Level 50.

The difficulty of learning Instant Strike could already rival a Tier 3 Taboo Skill. The Skill was definitely at the peak of Tier 2 Taboo Skills.

“Am I going to give up like this and complete my quest first?” Shi Feng muttered, feeling somewhat disappointed.

The Epic Quest Darkness Descends was not easy. It was especially true for the Dark Den. It was a Demon’s nest. There would definitely be plenty of extremely powerful monsters waiting for him. If he could learn a Taboo Skill, it would undeniably increase his chances of completing the Epic Quest. If he failed the quest, he would have to face the wrath of a Tier 4 Great Demon.

With his current combat power, even a Tier 3 Demon could kill him easily and take over his body, much less a Tier 4 Great Demon. That need only flick its wrist to turn him into ash and dust.

When Shi Feng reached the final page of the Skill Book, he discovered that there was another a paragraph of text.

If Skill Completion Rate reaches 100%, one can call forth Heavenly Thunder into one’s own body 100 times, stimulating the power of the Taboo Skill without needing the aid of the Thunder Crystals’ power.

“Shit! Skill Completion Rate of 100%? Are you kidding me?” Originally, Shi Feng had thought that he still had a trace of hope. After reading the Completion Rate requirement, however, he nearly spat out a mouthful of blood.

Even his past self had never achieved a 100% Completion Rate on any Skill.

Rumor had it that only Tier 5 Taboo Skills required a 100% Completion Rate. However, how many people in God's Domain were actually capable of learning a Tier 5 Taboo Skill?

"Forget it. I should just head to the Dark Den for now." For the moment, Shi Feng gave up on learning Instant Strike.

This Tier 2 Taboo Skill was most definitely a prank from the Black Wizard Glynne.

Shi Feng then stored the Instant Strike Skill Book in his bag. He traveled to the Bank and retrieved some tools and magic scrolls before activating the Tier 4 Position Teleportation Scroll, teleporting to the Dark Den.

Suddenly, Shi Feng transformed into a streak of white light that pierced the spatial crack that had appeared.

As a Demon's nest, the Dark Den was a carefully hidden location. Even if the armies of various kingdoms and empires tried to annihilate the Demons, they would only find minions. The true Great Demons nurtured their underlings in their nests in secret. Hence, the various kingdoms and empires throughout the continent of God's Domain had been helpless against Demons all this time.

At this moment, inside a dark cave, a spatial crack suddenly appeared near the cave's ceiling. In the next moment, a streak of light fell through the portal and landed heavily, creating a deep crater.

“This Position Teleportation Scroll is a huge scam.” Shi Feng frowned as he surveyed his surroundings.

Shi Feng suddenly realized that he was surrounded by Demonkins. The Position Teleportation Scroll had dropped him right in the middle of a Demonkin army.

[Demonkin] (Common Monster)

Level 40

HP 10,000/10,000

Shi Feng’s sudden appearance immediately attracted the attention of many Demonkins. The Demonkins turned to Shi Feng, one after another, their pitch-black eyes containing endless malice. Their gazes alone were enough to instill terror. Not to mention, their violent killing intent also took form, developing into a faint blood mist.

Shi Feng had seen this blood mist before. If players were caught within its range, it would significantly dull their five senses.

In God’s Domain, aside from having keen skills, one required powerful five senses to be considered an expert.

However, now that Shi Feng was trapped deep within the blood mist, he could no longer rely on his keen senses.

Chapter 573 - Another World

Such a powerful killing intent!

Shi Feng's five senses already felt greatly weakened. Whether it was his vision or intuition, it felt as if a layer of mist shrouded his entire body. He could not see clearly at all.

However, compared to the Demonkin army before him, what shocked Shi Feng more was the sound of the system notifications reaching his ears.

System: Player has discovered the Dark Den.

System: All communications with the outside world will be temporarily severed.

System: Player has been affected by the power of darkness. All Attributes decreased by 30%.

...

Line after line of system notifications rang out, leaving Shi Feng utterly speechless.

He could still accept his communications being severed, but reducing his Attributes by 30% as well? Wasn't this a little too harsh?

Originally, the monsters here were of a higher Level than him. Moreover, their numbers were also very frightening. Now that he was significantly weakened as well, the difficulty of collecting the Bible of Darkness was undoubtedly considerably higher.

Looking at the group of Level 40 black-skinned Demonkins charging at him like a tidal wave, Shi Feng felt his scalp tingling.

Currently, he was only Level 32. Although the Demonkins did not have a level suppression effect on him, with this many of them, even if he possessed large-scale destruction spells, they would not be enough to get him out of this predicament. Having no better option, he turned around and fled to a narrow pathway.

Although Shi Feng's Attributes had been reduced by 30%—his HP falling from over 10,000 to just over 8,000, and his Strength and Agility likewise seriously compromised—Shi Feng's equipment was simply too good. Despite his 30% Attribute reduction, his speed still greatly surpassed that of the Demonkins chasing after him. Very quickly, the Demonkins on his tail were eating his dust.

Seeing a horde of Demonkins blocking the entrance to the narrow pathway he was heading for, Shi Feng immediately took out an Intermediate Frost Grenade.

[Intermediate Frost Grenade]

Effective against monsters (and players) below Level 70.

Deals 800 frost damage to a radius of 12 yards, freezing targets for 5 seconds, then reducing Movement Speed by 60% for a duration of 12 seconds.

Each grenade cost 10 Silver—enough money to sustain an ordinary player in God’s Domain for quite some time.

To ensure he could complete this Epic Quest of his and obtain the Bible of Darkness, Shi Feng had been provisioning all this time. Meanwhile, the Frost Grenades were one of these provisions of his. He had even amassed plenty of Advanced Frost Grenades, which cost 70 Silver each.

The number of Demonkins before him was simply too frightening. This was no longer a problem he could solve by relying on technique. He could only use absolute power to break through. Hence, this was the best time to employ the Frost Grenades.

Tossing out one Intermediate Frost Grenade...

A large patch of Demonkins was instantly frozen solid, damage of -800 emerging above their heads. A large ice flower suddenly bloomed within the originally pitch-black area. Inside this dark cave, this ice flower looked extraordinarily beautiful and holy.

Another dozen or so Intermediate Frost Grenades followed in rapid succession. Flowers of ice bloomed one after another, and in the blink of an eye, practically all the Demonkins in Shi Feng’s way were frozen. As for the few Demonkins that remained unscathed, they were no threat to Shi Feng whatsoever. After a few evasive maneuvers, he was already past the Demonkin’s blockade. He then leaped into the narrow pathway.

However, the instant Shi Feng set foot in the narrow pathway, he suddenly felt death looming over him. He hurriedly activated the Aura of Earth’s Activatable Skill, Absolute Defense, becoming immune to all damage for five seconds. This could be considered Shi Feng’s most powerful Lifesaving Skill.

The instant the divine golden aura wrapped around Shi Feng's body, a clangor resounded throughout the cave.

Countless black threads had struck at Shi Feng's body. These black threads were extremely thin. In the darkness of the cave, they were practically invisible to the naked eye. If Shi Feng's intuition had not warned him of imminent death, these countless black threads might have devoured him already.

It's actually a trap! This Dark Den really isn't giving me any chances! Shi Feng felt his heart tremble momentarily when he turned back to glance at the tide of Demonkins that had been chasing him just now.

Any Demonkin struck by the black threads immediately exploded into a cloud of black mist, becoming deader than dead.

If he had been slower by even a heartbeat back then, he might very well have become one of those clouds of black mist right about now.

With the black threads having passed him already, Shi Feng quickly continued running forward.

At this moment, he had Absolute Defense activated. Nothing was capable of inflicting damage on him. In other words, he had no need to fear any traps right now. Naturally, he had to put Absolute Defense's duration to good use.

Moreover, in God's Domain, the more dangerous a location was, the more profitable it was.

Any place filled with plenty of traps definitely hid treasures.

The presence of traps in this pathway meant that this path was not a dead end, which gave Shi Feng even more reason to advance through it.

During Absolute Defense's duration of five seconds, with even Wind Walker activated, Shi Feng triggered a total of four traps. However, Absolute Defense blocked them all.

That was close. Fortunately, I have the Seven Luminaries Ring. Otherwise, I wouldn't even make it past the front door. Shi Feng halted his steps, breathing out a sigh of relief as he looked at the Demonkins chasing after him.

After receiving the attacks of multiple traps, the number of Demonkins still alive numbered less than 100. Moreover, now that Absolute Defense's duration had run out, only death awaited him if he advanced rashly. Hence, he might as well deal with these Demonkins in the meantime.

Swinging the Abyssal Blade, Shi Feng activated Skywheel Sword. Countless divine swords descended from above, immediately trapping these Demonkins within the cramped space. Meanwhile, damages of over -3,000 and -6,000 points appeared over every Demonkin's head.

Right after that, Shi Feng switched out the Aura of Earth for the Aura of Fire, then promptly cast Firestorm on these Demonkins. A moment later, silence filled the poorly illuminated cave.

Simultaneously, Shi Feng's EXP soared.

There was a difference of eight Levels between Shi Feng and the Demonkins. Even if the Demonkins were just Common Monsters, the total EXP they gave was still plenty.

However, at the end of the day, Common Monsters were still Common Monsters. They had dropped practically nothing at all.

Following which, Shi Feng patiently waited for Absolute Defense's Cooldown to end before advancing down the pathway once more.

By repeatedly running and stopping, Shi Feng triggered an unknown number of traps before finally arriving at the exit of the narrow pathway.

The instant he stepped out of the pathway, his eyes suddenly flinched.

"Why is there sunlight here?" Shi Feng wondered, unable to contain his surprise.

His eyes had already adapted to the darkness of the cave. Now that he suddenly emerged into bright light, his eyes failed to adjust to the abrupt change, causing his vision to go bleary.

Only after Shi Feng had fully recovered did he begin surveying his surroundings.

Tall mountains and flowing water. White clouds dotting the sky. Lush green forests that covered everything. How was this place a Demon's abode? Even paradise paled in comparison to this place.

What sort of situation is this? Shi Feng turned around to look at the cave behind him. A layer of black film covered the cave entrance, and he could not see anything inside the cave at all, similar to how he had been unable to see anything outside the cave before. Did I exit from the Dark Den?

No, that's not right. The system has not notified me that I have left the Dark Den. Moreover, my communication system hasn't recovered yet, proving that I have not left the Dark Den, and am in fact still inside the Dark Den.

Shi Feng shook his head.

He had little to no understanding of the Dark Den. All he knew was that Fantasy Extinguisher had completed this quest in the past and had brought immeasurable improvements to his Guild. Fantasy Extinguisher had never mentioned anything about the Dark Den itself to outsiders, so Shi Feng naturally remained ignorant.

Just as Shi Feng was sitting quietly by the cliff outside the cave, the sound of an explosion came from below the cliff.

"This should be an Elementalist's flame spell, Flame Dragon's Roar, right?" Shi Feng looked at the massive flame dragon soaring up from below the cliff. Unable to help his surprise, he muttered, "Is there an Elementalist battling down below?"

Chapter 574 - Curse

The battle below the cliff grew in intensity as more time passed. Aside from the booming of violent elemental mana, there were also thundering roars and the constant clash of metal reverberating in the canyon.

That's one intense battle. Seeing the trees being shattered and felled one after another, Shi Feng could not help but take a closer look at the ongoing battle.

In the forested canyon, Shi Feng could see a massive shadow moving through the trees. This shadow left a trail of destruction everywhere it passed.

Such a powerful monster. Judging from its Strength, which allows it to sweep away all obstacles in its path, it should not be any weaker than a Chieftain. Shi Feng then jumped off the cliff to take a closer look at the situation below.

He had come to the Dark Den to complete his Epic Quest.

This sudden battle before him might very well have some relation to the quest. Naturally, he had to go check it out.

If an ordinary player were to jump down from a cliff that was over a hundred meters tall, they would die the instant they landed.

However, Shi Feng did not mind. When he was about 20 meters above the ground, he activated Gravity Liberation, his body suddenly becoming as light as a feather. Due to the immense air resistance, Shi Feng's descent decelerated sharply, so he landed safely.

The instant Shi Feng's feet touched the green grass, he activated Omniscient Eyes, allowing him to perceive every movement within a radius of 100 yards. With this, he would be able to react immediately at the first sign of danger.

This was a habit he had picked up from his many years of adventuring.

When dealing with the unknown, caution had the top priority. Moreover, he was currently in the Dark Den, a nest of Demons. He needed to be even more cautious.

Meanwhile, the battle happening a distance away continued to intensify, so much so that even the ground was shaking right now.

When Shi Feng arrived at the battlefield, he discovered a giant black serpent over 50 meters in length swinging its tail around. With a single sweep, the serpent easily sliced apart a tree over one meter in diameter, leaving the surface of the cut as smooth as a mirror. With another casual swipe of its tail, the serpent split the ground, opening a deep gorge. Every one of the serpent's actions was capable of causing massive changes to its surroundings.

[Dark Magic Serpent] (Dark Creature, Chieftain Rank)

Level 42

HP 800,000/800,000

Meanwhile, fighting against the Dark Magic Serpent was a party of six players. Moreover, the players in this party were extremely powerful, with the average level of the party being Level 29. Even in Zero Wing, only Blackie had reached this level.

A Level 29 Shield Warrior currently stood at the forefront, fending off the Serpent's attacks, while two mages and a Ranger bombarded the Chieftain with a relentless stream of attacks. A Druid and a Cleric standing at the rear line were also continuously healing the Shield Warrior.

For a time, the battle remained at a stalemate.

"Ironwrist, be careful! It's using Vicious Venom!" hurriedly reminded the Ranger standing at the rear line when he saw the Serpent's belly expanding.

"Relax." The Shield Warrior named Ironwrist laughed, and instead of preparing to dodge, he took the initiative to charge at the Dark Magic Serpent.

The Dark Magic Serpent opened its mouth and began spewing black mist into its surroundings. All vegetation that came into contact with this black mist immediately withered and turned into ash.

In the next moment, the Shield Warrior rushing forward used Shield Bash on the Serpent's abdomen, interrupting its Skill and putting an end to the stream of black mist coming out of the monster's mouth. The black mist surrounding the Chieftain began thinning out right away.

However, the Shield Warrior was also poisoned as a result of his frontal assault, the skin all over his body turning pitch-black. His HP started decreasing rapidly, losing 3,000 HP with each passing second. In the blink of an eye, the Shield Warrior's HP hit a critical level.

Fortunately, the Cleric of the party had long since been prepared for this situation. He quickly cast Detoxify on his companion, cleansing the Serpent's venom just as it was about to deal damage for the

third time. Meanwhile, the Druid beside the Cleric had also promptly cast Life Restoration, healing the Shield Warrior for over 2,000 HP, followed by a HoT effect that recovered more than 300 HP every second, pulling the Shield Warrior out of death's grip.

Meanwhile, angered at the interruption of its Skill, the Dark Magic Serpent swept its tail at the Shield Warrior.

At this time, a golden arrow shot towards the Serpent's tail.

The instant the golden arrow collided with the Serpent's tail, it transformed into numerous chains that tied the Serpent to the ground.

However, the Dark Magic Serpent's Strength was too powerful. In the blink of an eye, it shattered the chains binding it and resumed its attack on the Shield Warrior. At this moment, the Elementalist of the party used Ice Wall, creating a wall of ice between the Serpent's tail and the Shield Warrior. When the Serpent's tail collided with the Ice Wall, its speed fell drastically. As a result, the Shield Warrior managed to dodge the Chieftain's attack effortlessly.

The entire process was like flowing water. The members of the party were perfectly attuned to one another.

Despite the Dark Magic Serpent having the advantage in Levels, this party of six was toying with it.

"Such amazing coordination," Shi Feng could not help but praise. "Just who are these people?"

The Dark Magic Serpent was a Level 42 Chieftain. Even a Guild's elite team would do their best to avoid such a monster. Yet, right now, a party of independent players was fighting it handily.

However, the thing that shocked Shi Feng the most right now was the fact that there were actually other players in the Dark Den as well.

The Dark Den was very mysterious and well-hidden. He had arrived in this place only after using a Tier 4 magic scroll. Meanwhile, these players before him had actually managed to find their way here. It was simply inconceivable.

At this moment, Shi Feng could not help but wish he could rush forward and question these people right away. If they truly had some other method to get to this place, he could then bring some helpers to help him complete his Epic Quest. That way, his chances of success would be even higher.

However, he suppressed this urge of his. Instead, he remained hidden in the forest as he quietly observed this party of players.

There were many incidents of players plundering other players in God's Domain. Currently, this party was still in the thick of battle against the Dark Magic Serpent. His making an appearance right now without any warning was highly likely to lead to misunderstandings. At that time, how was he supposed to get the secret of coming to this place out of them?

Time passed little by little.

The Dark Magic Serpent's HP continuously decreased, and soon enough, its HP fell to 30%.

"Sssss!"

The Dark Magic Serpent suddenly hissed loudly, its entire body exuding black mist. Very quickly, this mist then wrapped around the Chieftain's body and transformed into pitch-black scales. Under the bright sunshine, the scales released a blinding black light.

Chieftain ranked monsters normally entered a Berserk state when their HP fell below a certain level. Currently, the Dark Magic Serpent's HP had dropped to 30%, which just so happened to trigger the condition for going Berserk.

After the pitch-black scales were fully formed, the Dark Magic Serpent was like an Iron Serpent. Not only had its Defense and Magic Resistance improved significantly, but even its Strength had also increased by at least 30%. Right now, its every attack shook the earth.

However, the party of six had long since been prepared for this situation. The Cursemaner of the party immediately began tracing a large number of runes in the air, while chanting verse after verse of incantations. The density of the surrounding elemental mana had also started rising sharply.

"Amazing. That Cursemaner has actually learned the Tier 1 Curse Skill, Dark Storm." Shi Feng could not help his surprise when he saw the runes drawn out by that Cursemaner. "It's no wonder they dare to challenge a Level 42 Chieftain."

In God's Domain, physical Taboo Skills and magical Curses were both Skills that allowed players to combat enemies of a higher Tier.

However, Curses were much harder to learn compared to Taboo Skills, since Curses were much more powerful.

The instant the Cursemancer was done chanting the final verse of his incantation, the space surrounding the battlefield suddenly went silent as countless black blades of wind appeared surrounding the Dark Magic Serpent. These wind blades easily pierced through the sturdy scales of the Dark Magic Serpent.

A continuous stream of black wind blades assaulted the Chieftain for three full seconds.

The Dark Magic Serpent lost over 8,000 HP every second, losing over 20,000 HP after three seconds passed. Moreover, aside from these damages, the scales covering the Chieftain's body had also disappeared completely, returning it to its original form.

"Okay, let's finish it off!" The Shield Warrior, Ironwrist, immediately sent a slash at the Serpent.

However, before this party could celebrate, a loud hiss suddenly came from the woods.

"Sssss!"

At this moment, another Dark Magic Serpent emerged from the dense forest.

Chapter 575 - Twenty-four Consecutive Strikes

"Damn, it actually called a companion!" Ironwrist frowned.

The other party members also grew anxious at the arrival of another Dark Magic Serpent.

Facing one was already their limit. Moreover, their only Curse was on Cooldown, and it would be quite some time before they could use it again.

“Ironwrist, what are we going to do now?” the Cleric at the rear line asked hurriedly.

Ironwrist looked at the Dark Magic Serpent that they had injured heavily, before turning to look at the newly arrived Chieftain that was rapidly slithering towards them. Gritting his teeth, he said, “Let’s retreat!”

Although the heavily injured Dark Magic Serpent only had 30% of its HP remaining, they would still need quite some time to kill it.

Meanwhile, the Dark Magic Serpent was unlike other Chieftains. It was a Chieftain that possessed a potent venom.

When fighting against a Dark Magic Serpent, if one failed to interrupt the Chieftain’s Vicious Venom Skill in time, even a team of 100 players would die. If their party was fighting just one of these Serpents, they could still manage to interrupt its Skill. However, going up against two at the same time was impossible since their party did not have a second person capable of interrupting the other Dark Magic Serpent’s Vicious Venom. As long as the venomous mist of the Skill spreads, only death awaited them.

Hence, their only option right now was to retreat.

When the others heard Ironwrist’s command, they immediately withdrew without hesitation.

Unfortunately, although Ironwrist and the others had made the correct decision in this situation, the heavily injured Dark Magic Serpent had no intentions of letting them go. Widening its mouth, it shot jets of venom at Ironwrist and his team.

A short moment later, the other Dark Magic Serpent caught up with the party, circled around to their rear, and used its Tail Swipe Skill at the party's Cleric and Druid.

"Damn!" Ironwrist's complexion sank. Although he wanted to go save the two healers, the distance to them prevented him from doing so. Moreover, the Dark Magic Serpent in front of him was also bombarding him with venom attacks. Not to mention saving others, he was having a tough time just trying to avoid being hit himself.

"Leave us!" the Cleric named Off Fire shouted. He could not help squeezing his eyes shut when he saw the Serpent's tail swiping at him.

Against a Level 42 Chieftain like the Dark Magic Serpent, even their party's Shield Warrior, Ironwrist, could only survive two direct hits. As for cloth armor classes like them, the Chieftain would need only one hit to end their lives.

Boom!

The earth shattered.

“Huh? Why am I still alive?” Despite waiting for a long time, Off Fire did not feel any pain from the impact of the Serpent’s tail. He then cracked open his eyes, taking a peek at the Dark Magic Serpent. Immediately, a dumbfounded expression appeared on his face. “How is this possible?”

At this moment, whether it was Off Fire or his fellow party members, all of them had their mouths hanging wide open.

Standing before Off Fire right now was a person. Meanwhile, this person had actually blocked the Dark Magic Serpent’s attack using just one hand without so much as taking half a step back. Only, due to the immense force contained within the Serpent’s tail, the ground beneath this person’s feet had shattered.

A player had actually managed to overwhelm a Level 42 Chieftain. This scene was as if someone had stopped a moving truck using a single hand. How could it not be shocking?

However, what the party of six did not know was that the reason Shi Feng was able to block a Level 42 Chieftain’s attack with just a single hand was entirely due to his activation of Heavenly Dragon’s Power, which doubled his Strength. Otherwise, even Shi Feng, with his exaggerated Attributes, would not be able to receive the Dark Magic Serpent’s attack safely.

“You guys deal with the injured Dark Magic Serpent. Leave this one to me,” Shi Feng said directly.

In response, Off Fire and the others absentmindedly nodded their heads. It was as if Shi Feng was currently their party’s leader.

After saying so, Shi Feng immediately jumped up to the space above the Serpent’s head. Raising the Abyssal Blade, he activated Thunder Flame Explosion.

The power of lightning wrapped around the Abyssal Blade as the Magic Weapon landed on the Dark Magic Serpent's head.

Boom!

Lightning and flames instantly washed over the Dark Magic Serpent. Even though the Chieftain possessed very high Defense and Magic Resistance, it still suffered over -6,000 damage from the attack.

"Who is this person? Is it really possible for a player to be that strong?" Off Fire's jaw fell when he saw the damage Shi Feng had dealt.

Their party could be considered a top-tier party already.

Yet, the highest damage their party could deal a Dark Magic Serpent in a single instance was just slightly over -1,000. Meanwhile, Shi Feng had managed to deal over -6,000 damage in just a single attack. His damage output alone was already more than double that of their entire party.

The Dark Magic Serpent constantly let out anguished cries as it was bathed in the power of lightning and fire. It glared at Shi Feng with its chilling eyes. However, although it wished to devour Shi Feng, it was powerless to do so.

Other than dealing massive amounts of damage, the Tier 1 Thunder Flame Explosion also had a Fainted and Speed Reduction effect. Although the Fainted effect was not particularly effective against the Dark Magic Serpent, the Speed Reduction effect was highly effective. The Serpent's Movement Speed and Attack Speed instantly fell to only one-sixth of its original, its movements becoming extremely sluggish.

Only when Shi Feng had already landed back on the ground, did the Dark Magic Serpent's jaw, that was capable of swallowing a small car whole, begin descending towards Shi Feng.

Smiling, Shi Feng shifted his footwork slightly, easily dodging the Dark Magic Serpent's attempt to devour him. Turning his body, he followed up with a slash to the Chieftain's mouth.

The instant he struck the Serpent, it went flying, and its head smashed heavily into a tree. As the tree swayed wildly, damage of over -2,000 points appeared above the Serpent's head.

Such a high Defense. It's even higher than an ordinary Lord's. Just what kind of monster is this? Shi Feng clicked his tongue slightly.

He had activated not only Dragon's Power but also the Aura of Fire, which increased his damage by 40%. With his current equipment and Attributes, his normal attacks should still be able to deal over -3,000 damage, even if he was up against a Level 40 Lord. However, when it came to the Dark Magic Serpent, his attack only dealt more than -2,000 damage. To the Level 42 Chieftain, which possessed 800,000 HP, that amount of damage was practically negligible.

Just its battle recovery alone could regenerate 1% of its HP every five seconds. That was 8,000 HP every five seconds.

Should he encounter this Dark Magic Serpent without Dragon's Power, he would most likely have no choice but to flee.

On the other side, Ironwrist and the others had begun luring the heavily injured Dark Magic Serpent away from Shi Feng. If the two Dark Magic Serpents used Vicious Venom simultaneously, even a thousand-strong army would have to say their prayers.

Seeing that Ironwrist and the others had distanced themselves from him, Shi Feng now activated Nine Dragons Slash and Phantom Kill. At the same time, he had also had his doppelganger activate its ultimate move, Blade Liberation, increasing its Strength and Agility by 80%. With two of them attacking the Chieftain together, the battle became much more efficient.

Although the doppelganger's Strength was not comparable to the original, it surpassed Shi Feng in terms of speed. Taking hold of the Dark Magic Serpent's aggro, the doppelganger kited the Chieftain effortlessly. Meanwhile, Shi Feng himself attacked the Chieftain madly from behind.

Chop!

Thundering Flash!

Earth Splitter!

Finally, both original and doppelganger used Flame Burst simultaneously. Every single one of their attacks dealt over -10,000 damage and over -20,000 damage if their attacks triggered a critical hit. Out of the twenty-four consecutive hits, over half achieved a critical hit. In the blink of an eye, the Dark Magic Serpent's remaining 50% HP zeroed out. The Chieftain did not even get the chance to use Berserk.

The Dark Magic Serpent's death also allowed Shi Feng's EXP to soar.

In addition to the difference of ten Levels, the EXP a Field Chieftain provided was also very generous.

Aside from contributing a huge sum of EXP, the Dark Magic Serpent dropped seven items.

Only seven items dropped even after I activated Divine Providence? Isn't this Dark Magic Serpent a little too miserly? Shi Feng was stunned when he saw only seven items scattered on the ground.

Chapter 576 - Maverick

In God's Domain, a Chieftain ranked monster normally dropped around four or five items since a 20-man team could easily deal with a Chieftain of the same level.

As for Lords, these monsters usually required 50-man or 100-man teams of the same level to defeat, and the number of items they usually dropped was above ten pieces.

At Dark-Gold rank, Icarus's Heart possessed 14 Luck. Moreover, Divine Providence gave an additional 32 Luck when activated.

In total, Shi Feng could raise his Luck up to 46 points.

With so much Luck, Shi Feng had a high chance of triggering a jackpot even if he were to kill a Lord, not to mention a Chieftain. Yet, the Dark Magic Serpent had only dropped seven items...

Moreover, all seven of these items were very ordinary.

Usually, players would have a tiny chance of obtaining Fine-Gold Equipment from Field Chieftains. However, among the seven items Shi Feng obtained, there was no Fine-Gold Equipment at all. There were only two pieces of Mysterious-Iron Equipment and two pieces of Secret-Silver Equipment. All four

were Level 40 equipment. As for the remaining drops, they were three gray crystals. Taking a look at the crystals' information showed that all three were Common items.

What is going on here? Shi Feng was astonished when he saw the items the Dark Magic Serpent dropped. Despite his having such high Luck, the Chieftain dropped only such low-quality items. It was practically the lowest possible drop one could get from a Chieftain. Shi Feng then shook his head, dispelling his thoughts as he quickly stored the drops. Whatever. Best to take a look at the situation on other side for now.

Although the drops he obtained were unsightly, Shi Feng felt that it was somewhat reasonable after giving the matter some thought.

The higher the level one reached in God's Domain, the more difficult it was to obtain good equipment.

When players reached Level 40, the difficulty of obtaining Level 40 Secret-Silver Equipment was no less than the difficulty of obtaining Level 30 Fine-Gold Equipment at Level 30.

While Shi Feng was hurrying over to Ironwrist's side of the battlefield, the fight there had yet to end.

Currently, the Dark Magic Serpent still had 10% of its HP remaining. However, Ironwrist and the others were not doing too well right now. Due to the unexpected ambush earlier, the party's mages and healers had depleted themselves considerably. Now that they resumed their conquest of the heavily injured Dark Magic Serpent, they found the battle extremely taxing.

Hence, even after fighting for so long, they had managed to take away only 20% of the Dark Magic Serpent's HP.

“Everyone, keep it up! It has only 10% of its HP left! We should hurry up and finish off this Dark Magic Serpent, so that we can go help on the other side!” Ironwrist said as he blocked the Chieftain’s Tail Swipe using his shield.

Everyone nodded in agreement, and they began using everything they had.

The two mages each took out a Tier 1 magic scroll and started chanting.

Tier 1 magic scrolls were lifesaving items. Although the scrolls only contained Tier 1 Skills, the might of the Skills was much more than that of any ordinary Tier 1 Skill. Most importantly, these Tier 1 magic scrolls did not require any Mana to use.

The Ranger had also taken out 20 Special Arrows. These Special Arrows were Consumable items. Although they were not as expensive as a Tier 1 magic scroll, the combined value of 20 Special Arrows was no less than that of three Tier 1 magic scrolls.

The spells contained in the Tier 1 magic scrolls bombarded the Dark Magic Serpent one after another, each dealing over -3,000 or -4,000 damage—three or four times more damage than what the mages’ own Tier 1 spells were capable of.

The two mages’ bombardment instantly reaped over 20,000 HP from the Chieftain.

Meanwhile, every one of the Special Arrows the Ranger shot dealt around -1,500 damage to the Serpent. After firing all 20 arrows, the Ranger inflicted a total of -30,000-plus damage to the Chieftain.

In the blink of an eye, the Dark Magic Serpent's HP fell to a critical level. The Chieftain constantly let out anguished shrieks as the spells and arrows visited numerous terrible wounds on its body.

"Die!" Ironwrist shouted as he used Beheaded.

The Tier 1 Beheaded could instantly kill a monster with less than 5% HP remaining at a certain probability.

Ironwrist immediately slashed his saber down on the Serpent's head, dealing nearly -30,000 damage to the Chieftain and instantly killing it.

"Sss!"

The Dark Magic Serpent hissed one last time before its body fell to the ground.

"Whew, our win this time sure didn't come easy. I wonder if it dropped?" the Cleric, Off Fire, said as he breathed out a sigh of relief, his hand wiping away the sweat that had gathered on his forehead.

"We don't have time to care about these things. Dustwind, you stay behind and pick up the loot," Ironwrist instructed the Elementalist beside him. "Everyone else, follow me. Don't forget, we still have another full HP Dark Magic Serpent we need to take care of. Without anybody to Detoxify him, that person won't be able to last too long."

Although they had seen how powerful Shi Feng was, the Dark Magic Serpent was no ordinary monster. Particularly, without a Cleric to deal with the Chieftain's Vicious Venom, it was simply impossible for someone to defeat a Dark Magic Chieftain all alone.

When everyone heard Ironwrist's words, they immediately readjusted their moods and promptly broke out into a run towards Shi Feng's side of the battlefield.

However, before they managed to take two steps, they stopped cold.

Everyone was stupefied.

A person had suddenly walked out of the forest in front of them, and this person was none other than Shi Feng, the person they were just about to go save. Moreover, Shi Feng appeared completely unscathed. He had not lost even a single HP. There was also no sign of a Dark Magic Serpent behind him, proving that he had not escaped his battle but had instead finished it already.

The Dark Magic Serpent had an extensive hunting range. As long as one remained within this region, the Dark Magic Serpent would not give up on its pursuit. In other words, Shi Feng had single-handedly defeated a full HP Dark Magic Serpent. Moreover, he had killed it much, much faster than they had.

The difference in strength between them was simply unimaginable.

"Is he a monster? Off Fire's eyes widened in disbelief as he looked at Shi Feng walking over slowly. "Even our District Five's number one expert, Punishment Day, isn't capable of such a feat, right?"

"That person is definitely a Maverick, a solo expert standing at the peak of all great experts! Once we return, we can go boast to those in the Sixth Party!" Dustwind, the Level 28 Elementalist, exclaimed, his gaze filled with reverence as he looked at Shi Feng.

“Alright, enough fooling around. Stay serious. That person is our Seventh Party’s savior,” Ironwrist said. In fact, just like his companions, Ironwrist, too, was inwardly shocked by Shi Feng. It was definitely an honor to be able to become acquainted with such a solo expert out in the fields.

While Ironwrist and the others were happily chatting together, Shi Feng, who had overheard their conversation, grew confused.

“District Five?” This was the first time Shi Feng had heard this term.

In addition, Maverick? Did these people not see the Guild Emblem on his chest?

Moreover, looking at the reverence in their eyes, it seemed that what they revered was not his strength, but more of the fact that he was a Maverick, instead.

“That’s right, we’re the Seventh Party of District Five, and I am the party leader of the Seventh Party, Ironwrist. We are truly grateful for your help before, sir expert. Otherwise, our party would have truly been finished,” Ironwrist said gratefully.

Hearing Ironwrist’s words, Shi Feng grew even more confused.

“May I ask if this place is the Dark Den?” Shi Feng asked.

“Dark Den? I’ve never heard of such a place. Our party only operates in areas close to District Five. We’ve never ventured anywhere too far. I sincerely apologize for not being able to offer any help,” Ironwrist replied after giving Shi Feng’s question some thought. “However, the other parties in District

Five might know something about it. After all, the area our Seventh Party has explored is somewhat smaller than what the others have. Why don't you follow us back to District Five? I can help you ask around the other parties."

"Alright, I'll have to trouble you, then," Shi Feng agreed after thinking it over.

Shi Feng could tell that Ironwrist had not lied. However, the Shield Warrior's words left him thoroughly muddle-headed. He might as well go to this District Five and take a look around.

Meanwhile, when Ironwrist's party heard Shi Feng agree to accompany them back to District Five, they all showed excited expressions.

Chapter 578 - District Five

Time passed little by little. Before he knew it, Shi Feng had spent over an hour inside the bar already.

Although he had not done anything in particular, he had gained an enormous harvest.

The bar was somewhere players often conversed and exchanged information with each other, so collecting information was effortless, particularly information regarding District Five.

After going through the information he had, Shi Feng finally understood what kind of place District Five was.

He could not help but admit that it was similar to the real world.

To put it simply, District Five was a simple Shelter that allowed players to stay at a close distance to high-levelled monsters, removing the need to waste large amounts of time on travel.

As there were no teleportation arrays here, players had to rely on their own two feet to get anywhere.

Due to the large number of ferocious monsters in the area, players would generally form parties when venturing into the fields, not daring to go solo. Any player capable of moving solo in the fields was an expert among experts. These solo players were known as Mavericks, and they were the definition of strength. Hence, they were admired by many players.

Besides that, Shelters also served as a defensive measure against monster assaults because the nights in this place was extremely terrifying.

How terrifying were they?

At nighttime, monsters would group up and actively assault players. Even a 100-man team would not survive without the protection of the Shelter.

Moreover, even if players were inside the Shelter, they still needed to face the tsunami of monsters. Hence, the players here had no choice but to work together to fend off these monsters.

If the Shelter were compromised, then the activity range of players would be similarly affected. They would have no choice but to move their base of operations to a lower-level region. In the future, if they

wished to grind high-level monsters, they would have to waste a lot of time traveling from a low-level region to a high-level region.

Meanwhile, the nights here were longer than days. Out of the 48 hours in each day, 30 hours consisted of nighttime with only 18 hours of daytime. The time available for players to level up and improve themselves was much more limited.

This situation further emphasized the importance of Shelters.

After all, if players were to waste eight to nine hours on travel every day, how were they supposed to level up? Nevertheless, it was this dire situation that allowed the players here to have very high levels.

District Five was one of the Shelters located in a high-level region.

The players here did not have to waste a large amount of time on travel to encounter high-level monsters, go to high-level Dungeons, or take on high-level quests.

As the players here had to face the assault of a monster army every night, not only could they gain a considerable amount of EXP from killing these monsters, but they could also take the opportunity to complete high-level quests, obtaining significant sums of money and equipment.

Meanwhile, the most precious resource for a Shelter was the Soul Crystal. This item could be used to strengthen the magic array enveloping the Shelter, significantly weakening the monsters within the magic array's range and giving players an easier time pushing back the monster armies. If players donated Soul Crystals to the Shelter, they could receive large amounts of Contribution Shares in return. Contribution Shares were equivalent to money in Shelters, and players could use these points to purchase some specific items to strengthen themselves.

For example, the Tier 1 Curse that Ironwrist's party wielded was one of the good items acquired using Contribution Shares.

Hence, the players here had a great desire for Soul Crystals.

Only, this item was truly useless to Shi Feng. He would not be living in this place. He was only going to stay here as a guest until he completed his quest.

Although the Soul Crystals are useless to me, it won't be a bad idea to exchange them for some Gemstones. Shi Feng suddenly thought of a good idea to make money as he looked at the three Soul Crystals inside his bag.

Compared to the outside world, Gemstones were much more easily obtained in this place.

During the monster attacks at night, there was no lack of Chieftain and Lord ranked monsters. Chieftains had a high chance of dropping Tier 1 Gemstones, while Lords might even drop Tier 2 Gemstones. Hence, the supply of Gemstones here was much higher.

In the outside world, players very rarely had the chance to inlay Gemstones into their equipment. In here, however, it was very normal for players to have all the equipment on their bodies inlaid with Gemstones. As a result, the Basic Attributes of the players here were much higher than those of players in the outside world.

Meanwhile, the prices of Gemstones here were also much cheaper.

Outside, each Tier 1 Gemstone sold for 10 Silver, whereas Tier 2 Gemstones sold for 90 Silver to one Gold per piece. In here, however, five Silver could buy a Tier 1 Gemstone, whereas Tier 2 Gemstones only cost around 40 Silver.

As for Soul Crystals, each piece could sell for up to 40 Gold. Even then, players would still fight to buy it. The drop rate of Soul Crystals was abysmally low, and only Chieftains that were Level 40 or above had a slightly higher drop rate. This was also the reason why Ironwrist's party had gone hunting for Chieftains over Level 40.

By the time Shi Feng was done compiling the information he had gathered, Ironwrist had also entered the bar together with a silver-armored Guardian Knight.

The instant this bearded man with thick eyelashes entered, the bar fell silent. Every player inside the bar immediately turned to look at this Guardian Knight one after another.

"What's the party leader of the Third Party, Discipline Paradise, doing here?"

"Is Discipline Paradise here to recruit members?"

"How could it be? That's the Third Party of our District Five. Even if he were recruiting more members, he would choose from their list of available candidates first. Why would he come to a bar looking for members?"

"I heard that the six official members of the Third Party have all learned Tier 1 Curses and Taboo Skills. They can go out to grind without fear even during the night."

“That’s right. The Third Party’s strength is currently the closest to the First Party. It is highly possible that, after the next ranking battle, Discipline Paradise will become the leader of the Second Party.”

Everyone inside the bar looked at the silver-armored Knight with gazes of admiration and reverence.

In a Shelter, the higher ranked a party was, the more resources they could obtain. In addition, they would also gain greater access in the Shelter, allowing them to purchase items that were not available to regular parties. That way, their party’s strength would improve even faster.

Soon, Discipline Paradise and Ironwrist arrived before Shi Feng, who was currently seated at a corner of the bar.

“Brother Expert, let me introduce you. This here is the leader of our District Five’s Third Party, Discipline Paradise. He’s quite knowledgeable about the Dark Den you spoke of,” Ironwrist said, smiling.

“Hello, you can just call me Discipline.” Discipline Paradise smiled.

Although Discipline Paradise was one of the powerhouses of District Five, he did not display any form of arrogance. On the contrary, he was a very kind and straightforward man.

When the surrounding players saw Discipline Paradise, the leader of the Third Party, and Ironwrist, the leader of the Seventh Party, actively greeting a Swordsman that none of them had ever seen before, every one of them was stupefied.

“Who is that person? Why haven’t I seen him before?”

“Is he one of the top ten party leaders of some other District?”

“I don’t think he’s just limited to being in the top ten, right? Didn’t you hear Ironwrist calling that person an expert? That person might even be one of the top three party leaders of some other District. Otherwise, why would Discipline Paradise personally come over to meet him?”

Everyone began guessing at Shi Feng’s identity one after another.

However, Discipline Paradise’s next words instantly shocked everyone inside the bar.

“Brother Ye Feng, would you be willing to join our District Five’s crusading army?”

Chapter 579 - Crusading Army

“Join the crusading army?” Shi Feng began pondering silently.

He did indeed want to go and take a look at Gloomy Valley, with his goal for going there being the Chapter of Darkness. After all, there might be some sort of connection between the Chapter and the Bible of Darkness. However, he had intended to go there by himself.

There was only a single Chapter of Darkness. With so many people wanting to obtain it, how was he supposed to get it if he went with a group?

It was also unlikely that everyone would give him the Chapter of Darkness.

Hence, the only way for him to obtain it was to move alone. That way, he would not have to share the Chapter with others.

Based on the information he had gathered earlier, there was no need to defeat the Great Lord Noya to get the Chapter of Darkness. The Great Lord was simply guarding the Chapter of Darkness. Hence, Shi Feng could just steal the Chapter. There was no real need for him to conquer the Great Lord. The difficulty of obtaining the Chapter of Darkness this way was undeniably much lower.

Moreover, he had already succeeded in carrying out similar feats in the past.

Previously, he had stolen an Imperial Heirloom from the Anubis's Gatekeeper, a Great Lord ranked monster.

Afterward, he had also snatched the God Crystal from a Tier 4 Mythic Creature, the Orc King Tresik.

The first theft was difficult, but the subsequent one was easy.

Currently, he had much more confidence in stealing an item from a Great Lord.

"That's right, join the crusading army. To be precise, I am asking you to join our Third Party," Discipline Paradise said, his eyes filled with sincerity.

Hearing Discipline Paradise's words, all the players inside the bar could not help but turn to look at Shi Feng, envious expressions appearing on their faces.

The crusade this time was not something just anyone could participate in.

As it was a crusade against Gloomy Valley, the number of players they could bring was limited. Naturally, they would only allow elites to participate in it. That way would increase the chances of success considerably.

Meanwhile, in District Five, only the top ten ranking parties received direct admission into the crusading army. Everyone else had to go through a test, and only the best could join the crusade.

There were many players in District Five. Meanwhile, only a total of 100 slots were allotted to District Five for the crusade. Among them, 60 were already assigned to the top ten parties, so everyone else would have to fight for the remaining 40 slots. One could just imagine how intense the competition would be.

Now, Shi Feng could join the Third Party directly and participate in the crusade without having to compete over those 40 slots. This was practically a gift from the heavens.

As long as the crusade succeeded, the 100 players participating in it would receive a bountiful harvest, particularly in terms of Contribution Shares for the Shelter. How could this situation not make others envious?

"Discipline, how can you be so underhanded?!" Ironwrist suddenly called out. "Even if Brother Ye Feng is going to join the crusading army, he should be joining my Seventh Party, not your Third Party! I only invited you over to discuss matters relating to the Dark Den!"

When Ironwrist had gone looking for Discipline Paradise earlier, he had told the Guardian Knight everything about his encounter with Shi Feng. However, he had not expected Discipline Paradise to actually play such a card.

No matter how one looked at it, Shi Feng was a Maverick with frightening strength.

Although the crusading army this time had gathered the power of multiple Districts, after the crusade succeeded, the number of Contribution Shares awarded would be based on each party's performance in the crusade. In other words, the party that was the most helpful during the raid of the Great Lord Noya would receive the most Contribution Shares once the Great Lord was defeated.

Most importantly, the party that received the highest Contribution Shares had priority in choosing from the loot.

If Ironwrist could get a Maverick like Shi Feng to join the Seventh Party, his party's strength would no doubt soar. At that time, the number of Contribution Shares they could obtain was self-evident. Hence, he was doing everything he could to befriend Shi Feng.

"This is not a 'first come, first served' thing. Moreover, regarding this matter, I won't back off even if you're my friend," Discipline Paradise said in a righteous tone. "Also, it will be of great help to Brother Ye Feng if he joins my Third Party."

Suddenly, Discipline Paradise and Ironwrist began arguing with each other over Shi Feng.

"What is this situation? Can someone tell me who that Swordsman is?"

The scene of two District Five big shots arguing over an unknown Swordsman stunned the players drinking inside the bar.

“Great help?” Shi Feng could not help but ask, “May I know what kind of help Brother Discipline is referring to?”

“The Chapter of Darkness!” Discipline Paradise sent a whisper to Shi Feng. “This item serves a huge purpose for Shelters. However, it is also closely related to the Dark Den. From the information I gathered, the Chapter of Darkness is a key meant to open the Dark Den. Since Brother Ye Feng wishes to go to the Dark Den, you will naturally have to obtain the Chapter of Darkness.

“However, the Chapter of Darkness is in the Great Lord Noya’s hands. If one wishes to obtain it, they will have to either kill or steal the Chapter from the Great Lord. Only, the latter option is practically impossible. The only feasible method to gain the Chapter is to kill the Great Lord.

“As long as Brother Ye Feng joins our party, we will definitely have a chance to become the top contributing party in the crusade. At that time, we can choose the Chapter of Darkness as our reward. I will then use the Chapter of Darkness to open the Dark Den for Brother Ye Feng. What does Brother Ye Feng think about this?”

“So that’s the case.” Shi Feng suddenly came to a realization. Nodding, he said, “Alright, then. I’ll agree to your proposal. However, I wish to change the conditions a little.”

“Change the conditions?” Discipline Paradise asked, slightly worried. “What conditions? You can’t be wanting the Chapter of Darkness itself, right?”

The Chapter of Darkness had only two functions: empowering the magic array of a Shelter and opening the Dark Den.

To a Maverick, the first function was obviously useless. This was also the reason why Discipline Paradise had come looking to cooperate with Shi Feng.

“Rest assured, I don’t want the Chapter of Darkness. Only, if I manage to obtain the Chapter of Darkness by myself, what will you use to exchange for it?” Shi Feng asked secretly.

“Obtain the Chapter of Darkness by yourself? How can that be possible?” Discipline Paradise asked, stunned.

“I am only saying ‘if,’” Shi Feng laughed.

“If you manage to get the Chapter of Darkness by yourself, I will definitely provide you with sufficient remuneration—Taboo Skills, Curses, top-tier equipment, whatever—as long as you are willing to exchange it.” Discipline Paradise did not know what was going through Shi Feng’s mind, but if he could obtain the Chapter of Darkness, it would be of great help to their party. Hence, he was willing to pay any price for it.

Shi Feng was slightly stunned after hearing Discipline Paradise’s words.

“Exchanged Taboo Skills can be traded?” Shi Feng asked softly.

Discipline Paradise nodded. “Of course. Only, the price required to do so is somewhat high. However, for the Chapter of Darkness, I am willing to pay six Tier 1 Taboo Skills.”

“Six?” Shi Feng shook his head. “If I obtain the Chapter of Darkness, I want to exchange it for a Tier 1 Taboo Skill for every class, as well as the activation of the Dark Den.”

“Can you really do it?” Discipline Paradise asked in surprise.

A Tier 1 Taboo Skill for every class, this price was indeed frightening. Even for Discipline Paradise, this was a very steep price. The Chapter of Darkness was merely a Dark-Gold item with a somewhat special function. In truth, it was worth only seven or eight pieces of Dark-Gold Equipment.

Meanwhile, the value of a Taboo Skill was no less than a piece of Dark-Gold Equipment. Since there was a total of twelve major classes, that meant a total of twelve Taboo Skills—equivalent to twelve pieces of Dark-Gold Equipment.

Dark-Gold Equipment was considered a luxury item for any party. If one had to give away twelve pieces all of a sudden, any party would feel a sting in their hearts.

However, compared to this painful price, what Discipline Paradise was most concerned about was whether or not Shi Feng could obtain the Chapter of Darkness.

Chapter 580 - Abyssal Upgrade

In response to Discipline Paradise’s question, Shi Feng only smiled while remaining silent.

Receiving such a reply from Shi Feng, Discipline Paradise didn't get angry; his eyes glowed with excitement, instead, his trust in Shi Feng growing even stronger.

Previously, he had heard from Ironwrist that Shi Feng had managed to defeat a Level 42 Chieftain ranked Dark Magic Serpent all by himself. This was definitely a feat that no ordinary person was capable of.

Currently, there were only ten parties capable of hunting Dark Magic Serpents in District Five. Other than their excellent techniques and equipment, the main reason why these ten parties were equal to the task was their having learned Tier 1 Taboo Skills that countered these Chieftains.

Otherwise, they all would be powerless against Dark Magic Serpents.

As for defeating a Dark Magic Serpent single-handedly, not even he, the leader of District Five's Third Party, had ever dreamed of attempting such a feat.

Due to this reason, he had come over personally to invite Shi Feng to join their team and aid them in competing for the Chapter of Darkness.

"When will Brother Ye Feng be able to obtain the Chapter of Darkness?" Discipline Paradise asked somewhat anxiously. Hints of reverence and elation gleamed in his eyes.

Although several Districts were participating in the crusade against the Great Lord Noya this time, Noya was a Level 40 Great Lord. Even if everyone combined their power, victory over the Great Lord was still a long shot. They had made ample preparations, yet their current predicted success rate was below 10%. The odds for stealing the Chapter of Darkness weren't worth mentioning.

It was not easy for a party to survive in a Shelter. Besides constantly competing over the party rankings inside a Shelter, parties also needed to defend the Shelter every day lest the Shelter fall into ruin and all their efforts come to naught.

Now that an expert like Shi Feng had shown up, the Third Party would have a much better chance at obtaining the Chapter of Darkness.

Noya was no ordinary Great Lord; it was a Guardian Monster serving as the key for activating a new map.

Such Guardian Monsters normally tested a player's individual abilities. Having more players participating in the crusade would only lead to more mistakes occurring.

Ever since God's Domain began, Mavericks had been the ones to activate many of the new maps. Hence, everyone in this place revered Mavericks greatly as they had managed to accomplish a task that most parties couldn't.

Meanwhile, this was the first time Discipline Paradise encountered a Maverick as strong as Shi Feng. Shi Feng's chances of obtaining the Chapter of Darkness were definitely much higher than their crusading army's.

"I'll give it a go as soon as possible." Shi Feng could not give an accurate timeline. After all, he had not yet seen Noya personally. However, with his equipment and means, he should have an excellent chance of stealing the item the Great Lord was guarding. "I hope that Brother Discipline can prepare the Tier 1 Taboo Skills as soon as possible."

Tier 1 Taboo Skills and Curses were not cabbages piled high in the market. Based on the information Shi Feng had collected, out of the tens of thousands of players in District Five, only the top five parties possessed six or more Tier 1 Taboo Skills and Curses. Ironwrist's Seventh Party had two; however, currently only one of his members had succeeded in learning a Tier 1 Curse. One could just imagine how difficult it was to obtain Tier 1 Taboo Skills and Curses.

"Brother Ye Feng can rest assured on this point. As long as you succeed in getting the Chapter of Darkness, I will definitely hand over twelve Tier 1 Taboo Skills." Discipline Paradise laughed confidently.

Following which, Discipline Paradise shared with Shi Feng specific information regarding Noya.

Unfortunately, Shi Feng and Discipline Paradise's conversation in a private chat dismayed Ironwrist, who was seated beside the two. However, seeing how Discipline Paradise, the leader of the Third Party, was acting so respectfully with Shi Feng, Ironwrist also could not help but feel a little prideful.

After Discipline Paradise left, Shi Feng looked at the depressed Shield Warrior and said, "Brother Ironwrist, can I get you to help me with something?"

"Brother Ye Feng, please don't hold back. You are our party's savior. If you have anything you need help with, just tell me!" Ironwrist assured, clapping his chest.

"Can you help me exchange these Soul Crystals for some Level 30 Fine-Gold ranked or above weapons?" Shi Feng asked as he took out three gray crystals from his bag.

"Heavens! You actually have so many Soul Crystals!" Ironwrist's eyes nearly fell out of their sockets when he saw the three Soul Crystals Shi Feng produced.

He finally realized why Shi Feng seemed to care little about Soul Crystals before.

In order to obtain just one Soul Crystal, their Seventh Party had spent several days hunting Dark Magic Serpents. In the end, they had gotten one only by sheer luck. He had even shown off their party's harvest in front of Discipline Paradise.

Yet, now, Shi Feng just casually took out three Soul Crystals...

Seeing that Ironwrist was still silent after quite some time, Shi Feng could not help but ask, "Has nobody managed to obtain Level 30 Fine-Gold Weapons yet?"

The players residing in District Five were very high-leveled. The high-ranking parties often challenged monsters of higher levels. Although only a few parties were capable of defeating Level 40 monsters, there should be plenty that could handle monsters that were Level 30 or so. Shi Feng had also seen plenty of players selling Level 30 Bronze and Mysterious-Iron Equipment on the streets earlier. Moreover, they were selling the items very cheaply. This was a scene that had yet to appear in White River City.

However, after giving it some thought, Shi Feng found it to be reasonable.

The players here were killing monsters day in and day out—especially since monster armies attacked the Shelter at night. They were improving their combat techniques daily. In addition to other factors, such as Gemstones, challenging monsters of a higher level was routine.

However, while the players here found it very normal to fight against monsters of a higher level, it was a different story for the players outside the Dark Den. Players outside preferred to grind monsters of a lower level whenever possible. They definitely would not choose to grind monsters that were of the same level as, or even higher level than, they were, as doing so would mean increased risk. As a result,

players outside the Dark Den improved their combat techniques and upgraded their equipment at a much slower rate.

“That’s not it. Brother Ye Feng, do you really want to exchange Soul Crystals for weapons? That’s just such a waste. Although the market value of a Soul Crystal is equal to one Level 30 Dark-Gold Weapon or five Fine-Gold Weapons, no one who manages to obtain a Soul Crystal would exchange them for equipment or weapons. After all, weapons and equipment will depreciate with time. On the other hand, the Contribution Shares one can acquire with Soul Crystals will never lose their value. The true value of a Soul Crystal is far above a Level 30 Dark-Gold Weapon. It will be an even greater loss if you exchange it for Level 30 Fine-Gold Weapons,” Ironwrist advised.

The Shield Warrior’s words rendered Shi Feng somewhat dumbfounded.

Soul Crystals were really of no value to him. On the other hand, the value of Fine-Gold and Dark-Gold Weapons was much higher.

As for why he wanted these weapons, he was planning to upgrade the Abyssal Blade to Level 30.

A Level 40 Great Lord was no pushover, and it would be to Shi Feng’s benefit to increase his combat power as much as possible. As a Magic Weapon, the higher-levelled the Abyssal Blade was, the higher its Attributes and quality would be.

When Shi Feng first obtained the Abyssal Blade, the Magic Weapon’s Attributes were only equal to a Secret-Silver Weapon. Now that the weapon was Level 25, its Attributes were already above Dark-Gold rank. If Shi Feng upgraded it to Level 30, it might reach the standard of an Epic Weapon.

A Level 30 Epic Weapon would definitely push his combat power up to a whole new level. At that time, he would have much more confidence in stealing the Chapter of Darkness.

Seeing how Shi Feng was insistent on exchanging his Soul Crystals for weapons, Ironwrist had no choice but to comply and think of a way to carry out the Maverick's wishes.

An hour or so later, Ironwrist had managed to exchange the three Soul Crystals for one Level 30 Dark-Gold Weapon and eleven Level 30 Fine-Gold Weapons.

After Shi Feng received the weapons, he parted ways with Ironwrist and went searching for a secluded location.

The commotion the Abyssal Blade caused with each subsequent evolution grew increasingly larger. Now that Shi Feng was about to upgrade the Magic Weapon to Level 30, the aftermath would definitely alarm the entire District Five. Not wanting to attract any attention to himself, Shi Feng had no choice but to head for an out-of-the-way spot.

"Devour!" Shi Feng chose to upgrade the Abyssal Blade upon arriving at a wilderness with no other players around.