

The Legendary Moonlight Sculptor

(달빛 조각사)

Volume 05

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Story Description:

The man forsaken by the world, the man a slave to money and the man known as the legendary God of War in the highly popular MMORPG Continent of Magic. With the coming of age, he decides to say goodbye, but the feeble attempt to earn a little something for his time and effort ripples into an effect none could ever have imagined.

Through a series of coincidences, his legendary avatar is sold for 3.1 billion won, bringing great joy to him, only to plunge him into despair at losing almost all of it to vicious loan sharks. With revelation of money through gaming, he rises from the abyss with new found resolve and steps forward into the new age of games led by the first ever Virtual Reality MMORPG, Royal Road.

This is the legend of Lee Hyun on his path to becoming Emperor with only his family loving heart, his boundless desire for money, his unexpected mind, his diligently forged body and the talent of hard work backing him.

Original Story can be found here: [Link](#)

Chapter 1: The Tomb of the Great King

As Weed walked down the hall with the Knights, he thought deeply about the current problems at hand.

‘A legendary tomb that will leave a mark in history. One that is great and Majestic. A monument worthy of a King.’

It wasn’t going to be easy to build such a tomb while adhering to the King’s tastes. However Weed wasn’t known for giving up before even trying.

‘I have little talent in doing anything. But what if I combine what little talent I have with sheer effort and determination? Then, of course, I will succeed. Has that method ever failed me until now?’

No. Not even once was the answer.

In any business, hard work is the key to success. It’s a given that it is 99% hard work and 1% genius. No matter how talented you are, if you don’t put any effort in, you won’t reach your goal.

‘There’s nothing I can’t do!’

Weed was inspired.

The size of the tomb had to be overwhelming. Any flaws on its sculptural design would be compensated by its size. Similar to his greatest creation, the Ice Dragon, the bigger, the better.

‘I’ll build the most majestic royal tomb! And of course, I will succeed!’

Upon completion of this quest, Weed would receive a large amount of experience as well as a rare weapon. However, he didn’t know the answer to the biggest question; how should he build the tomb?

- Weed, did you finish your audience with the King?

Pale suddenly whispered him. He became worried after Weed had been escorted away by the Royal Knights.

Weed whispered back:

- Yeah, I'm on my way out.
- We're all worried about you. Is everything okay?
- Yes. I've received an important quest from the King.
- I see. So you're leaving again...

Pale's voice was filled with sorrow. Surka, Irene, and Romuna felt the same. It had been awhile since their last meeting in the dungeons of Lavias, and now, just a few hours later, they would have to part again.

- Nope. This time, Pale-nim and the others can participate as well.
- Really? You should share even though the quest is from the King himself?
- Yes.
- By the way Weed, there's a huge crowd gathered at the entrance of the Palace. To be honest, I've never seen so many players in one place. If you get involved with the commotion, it might be a problem.
- There are a lot of people?
- More than words can describe. If you don't come out soon, they might start storming the palace.

Pale gave an accurate description of the situation. A massive amount of people were clamoring outside..

The King's Quest!

Hard work and artistic sense! The Majestic Tomb!

At that moment, Weed's thoughts gathered to construct a scheme, and his mouth stretched into an ominous smile.

'Yes! I've decided. This is it!'

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Pale, Irene, Romuna and Surka, quietly cheered for Weed.

"It's hard to believe that the quest is from the King!"

"Tell me about it. It looks like the quest will be fun!"

Weed's quest from the King was a huge event. Because of that, they whispered carefully so that nobody else could overhear them.

"Are you sure we'll be able to participate?"

"Yes, Weed said that he absolutely needed our help. There's nothing to worry about."

"Rather, I'm worried whether Weed can make it out safely," Irene said anxiously.

Multitudes of players swarmed the Palace walls. The moment Weed appears, the players might start bombarding him with questions, and wouldn't stop until their curiosity was satisfied.

For someone like Weed who only lived for money and preferred to be alone, he would not like being harassed by a huge wave of people.

"Please, let Weed come out of there unharmed" Irene prayed silently.

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Weed came out of the Palace through the front gate where, by now, an immeasurable amount of players had gathered.

Players abandoned their activities after hearing rumors of the first player to have an audience with the King. People also surrounded the back, suspicious that Weed would try and sneak out the backdoor. However, Weed boldly came out the front gates, instantly becoming the center of attention.

"How were you able to meet the King?"

"Tell us how we can have an audience with the King!"

"We also want to meet the King, please tell us!"

A number of people started asking questions at the same time, which resulted in shouting people drowning each other out. As the crowd shouted out, Weed examining the crowd's equipment.

'You can buy those travel clothes for 3 gold'

Weed started appraising their equipment.

‘That shield costs 6 gold, but considering how worn out it looks, he probably bought it off someone. If he’s good at bargaining, he might have been able to buy it for 2 gold’

Although there were some experienced players mixed in, the vast majority of the crowd was made up of newbies. Due to their low levels, they have yet to venture out of the city. The areas around Serabourg were perfect hunting grounds for beginners, so when the rumors began to circulate, they were among the first to arrive at the scene.

“Ahem” Weed cleared his throat

Just building a tomb was simple. But building a royal tomb that would satisfy the king and be able to strike awe into anyone who looked at it was an entirely different matter. If he were to try and construct it alone, it would take more than a year. Therefore, getting the job done quickly would require a huge amount of workers. Workers who would follow Weed’s orders unquestionably.

‘These people will be my workers’

Weed used his Advanced Level 3 Lion’s Roar to address the gathered crowd; otherwise, he would not have been heard by all.

“All of you, listen up! I will now inform you that I have just received a quest from His Majesty, King Theodarren, the ruler of Rosenheim Kingdom”

You have used Lion’s Roar

His loud voice reverberated throughout the crowd. It sounded as if he were speaking from right next to them in a clearly audible and perfectly articulated voice. The majority of them had never heard such a powerful and clear voice before.

The interest of the crowd was once again ignited.

“What? A quest?”

Just meeting the King was incredible, but...”

“A quest from the King himself?”

“First time ever in the entire Versailles continent?”

“The first. It is the first time in the entire continent that a King has made a request”

The surrounding players became even more excited.

“Please tell us what the quest is!”

“Help us meet the King too!”

Their chatter overlapped and became incomprehensible, yet again. Weed stimulated their excitement even more when he said, “I’ve been commissioned to build something very unique for the king. Fortunately, the quest can be shared!”

“Ooohhhh!”

“Let us be part of it!”

The crowd’s natural response regarding a quest directly from the King! They wanted to participate in such a quest even if they had to beg for it!

“Of course I will share it with everyone. Is it not our duty to help everyone else on the continent of Versailles who live and breathe the same air? However, getting to this stage was not easy, so I would like to receive an entry fee of 1 gold per person”

Everyone’s expectations became amplified. Blinded by Weed’s words, they thought his sharing of the quest was an act of virtue.

“That’s fair. I absolutely agree with you”

“Such a great man...”

“I’m willing to put my trust in such a guy!”

In the eyes of people right then and there, Weed was the most noble and righteous player in the continent of Versailles. It was a quest that had a difficulty rank of B. Even less difficult quests, like D or lower rank quests, were only shared for a huge amount of money if it was rare. However, Weed was willing to share his quest for just 1 gold.

As people looked at him, they only saw a kind face that led them to

believe he was completely sincere, but in actuality Weed was busy calculating the potential profit to be made.

‘We’ll feel guilty if we obtained the quest for free...’

‘So that’s why he’s asking for a small amount of money!’

People misunderstood Weed’s intentions. After having heard his speech, their doubts were dispelled and they began to respect him more. A food with an appealing flavor is more likely to be bad for our body!

Everyone, at least once in their lifetime, will make this mistake; to get backstabbed by seemingly reliable and trustworthy people.

These words did not do Weed justice.

- What do you think Weed is trying to do?
- I suddenly feel extremely anxious.
- What is his purpose addressing all of these people...
- The King’s quest can’t be that bad..... can it?

Pale, Irene, and the others knew about Weed’s personality, so they were whispering each other, discussing the situation at hand.

There was something strange was going on!

They walked closer to the crowd, just in time to see that the people gathered had already fallen for Weed’s scam. Weed, with his dignified features and charismatic speech, made people believe in him, but those who were acquainted with Weed knew that he had a hidden agenda.

“Now then, I’ll share the quest with you.”

Weed raised his voice to be loud enough that veins began to pop out of his neck..

“First, I should warn you, that given the difficulty of the quest, you must promise me that you will follow all of my orders. I will only share the quest to those who make an oath”

The crowd was given a chance to reconsider their decisions, but in the end they all decided to follow Weed. They didn’t question the reason why

if someone would share a quest commissioned by the King.

There was no time to think!

Another uproar flared up and players made haste towards Weed to receive the quest.

“Move over, I’m first!”

“What are you talking about, I was here before you!”

In a moment, people formed a long queue to receive the quest. The line started from the Palace gates, spanned to the streets, and continued to grow even longer. Those who weren’t able to see how the event started also lined up, with hopes of joining the expedition and receive something of value.

“Will you follow my commands until the quest is complete?”

“Of course. Thank you for letting me join.”

After receiving the quest, Weed received 1 gold.

Ding

Help Sculptor Weed build a prominent Tomb

King Theodarren of Rosenheim has little time left to live. In preparation for his death, he desires for an imperial tomb.

Difficulty: ‘B’.

Reward: If successful, you will receive at least 50 points of reputation with the Royal Court.

Depending on the amount of work you do, additional Fame and rewards may be granted.

“Thank you.”

“Really, you have my gratitude.”

After receiving the quest, the players gratefully thanked him. Because the quest was originally given to Weed, he had the authority to select who he wanted to join him. Though the rewards for other people were different from the prizes for his initial quest, people were still happy to be able to join a B rank quest given by the King.

Finally, it was Pale and his party’s turn.

“Wow, a B rank quest...”

“You said you needed our help?”

Pale felt like his heart was about to burst out of his chest. Why did he ever believe Weed?! The moment he saw Weed with his innocent expression, he should have suspected something. And once he heard Weed announced that he would share the quest, he should have thought of an excuse and ran away. He should have felt that something was off. The B rank quest.

Pale and the girls knew exactly how Weed had completed a similar quest back in the province of Mora, so now they were in the state of panic and dreaded what was coming.

“I will follow your every command.”

“Assign any task to me, I won’t fail you.”

Almost every player present wanted to participate in the construction of the tomb. Getting such a quest was the cause of excitement for everyone in the crowd. This was no surprise since the majority of the people were beginners and never before had someone commissioned a B rank quest, usually restricted to higher level players, for just 1 gold.

While he was commissioning people, Weed started to prepare the necessary things for the plan in his head.

“First of all, I need to pick a good spot to build the tomb. An open area with a good view of mountains and rivers. Does anyone know of such a place?”

As soon as Weed asked, a couple of people raised their hands.

“I know a place like that!”

“Me too! It’s on the eastern plains close to the Serabourg castle . It has a river to the north, and mountains to the south.”

“What about the hill to the north of the castle? It’s a sunny area with a great view”

One of the most important elements of creating a successful sculpture is

to take its surroundings into account and take advantage of where the sculpture will be built.

Feng-Shui!

For a greater chance of success, he needed to choose a perfect place. Weed decided to personally visit the suggested sites before settling for the best.

When Weed moved, thousands of players followed. Along the way, other players started join, similar to a snowball gaining mass as it rolled down a hill.

Finally, Weed stopped in an area East of the Serabourg Palace. There was more than enough space for the construction, and there were large boulders everywhere.

‘There are a lot of stones, and the ground is pretty solid... The scenery is fine. This is it.’

Usually, tombs were built in ravines or mountains. But to make a tomb that fit with Weed’s grand vision, he needed a broad and flat area.

“Now that that I’ve decided on this place, we’ll need a lot of building materials to construct the tomb. Does anyone know of any nearby quarries? We’ll need stones that can withstand a great deal of weight.”

“I know of one” an answer was immediately heard from the crowd.

People usually overlooked places such as quarries, however, the people in the crowd knew of many places like that.

Weed decided to visit the quarries. Incredibly large stones were piled up like a mountain. With a little work, they should be able to make the stones into the materials they needed to build the tomb.

Turning the face the crowd, Weed addressed them again.

“Now then, let’s get started on the B rank quest!”

“Whhooooaaa!”

“As you know, the rewards will be given according to your performance,

so we'll start working as soon as possible, and that means now. Those who cannot or are unwilling to participate today can begin tomorrow"

"Let's get started!"

"We've got no time to lose!"

There was a large amount of rewards and fame riding on this quest. Naturally, people wanted to begin immediately.

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There are many Kingdoms and adventurers scattered throughout the continent of Versailles! However, despite the great distances, rumors traveled at the speed of light.

On Royal Road's website, someone wrote an article:

Topic: B rank difficulty quest.

Something incredible is happening in Rosenheim Kingdom.

For the first time ever, a player appeared and received an audience with the King. And what's even more surprising is that he announced that the King commissioned him to a B rank quest and shared it with the other players.

Sharing a high ranking quest made no sense.

Generally, higher level players had to form parties for a slim chance to complete such quests. And in Rosenheim Kingdom where majority of people are still low levels, sharing a significant quest is reckless.

I was there to witness the event, but was against the idea.

To my surprise, the player's profession was a sculptor. The B rank quest was to build a Royal tomb. Yet everyone joined the quest as it seemed to yield great rewards.

The somewhat exciting post of a B rank quest instantly caught the attention of a large amount of people. The article created a chain reaction. Coincidentally, most of the posted topics on Royal Road's website were written by players from the center of the continent.

Many players gathered their information from stories of veterans who were in the center of the continent. Therefore players who started on the edge of the continent were disregarded. The center of the continent was thought to be exemplary, as most of the good weapons, armors, and information came from there. However, this was the first time players from the central regions were envious of those who started in the

Kingdom of Rosenheim, which was once considered an ‘undeveloped frontier’.

- Do you really think it's a B rank difficulty quest?
- If this is true, it'll be epic.
- And they said anyone can participate... Players from Rosenheim Kingdom sure are lucky.
- I'm from Dor Kingdom, but I'm going to Rosenheim as fast as possible.
- A sculptor... I didn't know such a profession even existed. I'm surprised that he met the King and received such a high ranking quest.

An illusion about the sculptor profession was ingrained into the minds of people. A high-level quest commissioned directly from the King was given to this class. Suddenly the number of novices holding sculpting knives increased, and sculpture shops were often filled with customers.

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Players swarmed the mountains around the quarry like ants.

“O wind, condense into a blade and pursue my enemies! Wind Cutter!”

Mages gathered all their mana and fired spells. They targeted the rocks!

“My axe has no rival! It can shatter anything! Double Strike!”

Axe-wielding Barbarians used all their strength as they struck the rock.

Players used various skills, spells and techniques to divide the stones and shaped them into squares; then mages used spells to decrease the weight of the stones while the remaining players would carry them to the construction site.

“Everyone! When we count one, two, three, lift the rock! Heave-ho!”

Dozens of players hauled the stones to the foot of the mountain. Nobody tried to rush, as carrying a large boulder down the steep mountain slope was dangerous. Stones were then loaded into wagons and carts to be dragged the rest of the way.

“Move faster!”

“Let’s just carry these ourselves!”

With great effort, stones were beginning to pile up in the area East of Serabourg’s Palace. Players carried stones through sweat and tears!

‘I’m so tired I could drop dead.’

‘This weight will drive me crazy.’

‘I’m tired.’

Every player who carried a stone was tempted to quit a hundred times. But once they delivered the stone they are currently carrying, they always returned for the next one.

Damn addictive!

The prestigious B rank quest warped their ability to reason. To top it off, the wicked Weed devised a scheme to brainwash the workers. Whenever a player delivers a stone, Weed would tell them how much work they had done.

“That was your 12th stone. At the moment, the record is 14 stones.”

Subtle rivalry.

In addition, the majority of the players who were in front of Serabourg’s Palace had joined the quest. They were blinded by the King’s quest as differences in levels and professions became pointless. No matter how tired they were of the job, they did not give up. Even when they promised not to carry another stone, but when they reached the quarry, they ended up changing their minds.

‘I’ll carry one more stone’

‘I’ll definitely succeed!’

That was the temptation of the B rank quest.

*

Pale felt shivers run down his spine.

He looked down and saw a countless number of people carrying stones. People of all ages and gender were carrying stones. There was no end to

the line.

‘People have to do hard labor even in a game...’

At the tremendous sight, Pale couldn’t hold his admiration. Weed solved everything with hard work and his enthusiasm spread to the people.

“Oooiii! Pale, move faster!”

Pale turned and glanced behind his back. Irene, Romuna, and Surka who were following him almost ran into him.

“Pale, you’re slowing everyone down!”

“ ... ”

Pale was speechless. What can else could he say? They were already in Weed’s clutches! Even Pale was carrying a stone. He could not resist the temptation of the fame and rewards promised for completing the B rank quest.

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KMC Media would periodically browse blogs, forums, and websites dedicated to Royal Road. To create a good report, they had to cover large quantities of information and react quickly to situational changes. Most of the information in the internet was garbage. However, there’s still hope that even in a pile of rubbish something intriguing would appear.

First the experts separate interesting bits of information, and then a special team verifies its authenticity.

Information of the B rank quest in Rosenheim Kingdom got caught in their Information Network.

The Production Director, Experts, and Script Writers immediately gathered for a meeting.

“How reliable is that information?”

“Production Director, the source is still unknown, but the information seems to be true. All the players of Rosenheim Kingdom are familiar with the event. The spies we have planted among the players have sent

confirmation of this.”

“Then shouldn’t we send a special correspondent immediately?”

“I think Shin Hye-Min is in Rosenheim Kingdom at the moment. A while ago, she said she was going there to do some quest”

Shin Hye-Min was considered one of the best hosts of KMC Media’s Royal Road division.

“Well, that’s a relief. Have Shin Hye-Min cover that story”

“Wait a minute. This morning she contacted us and said that something urgent came up and asked not to call her for a while...”

“Hye-Min did? That’s unusual” The Production Direction doubtfully said.

Shin Hye-Min was never late for a shooting, and thought to be a very responsible reporter.

“There’s such an important event going on the Rosenheim kingdom. What could possibly be important enough to disregard such a thing...”

“Well, maybe...”

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“Ugh, this is heavy”

Maylon carried a stone with a groan. A large boulder rested on her shoulder supported only by her two arms.

‘I’m doing this for the fame’

She had experienced a lot of hardship because of her low fame stat. Early on when she was unfamiliar with the game, she would die often while hunting. Because hunting monsters in parties means sharing experience with the rest of the group, it was hard to gain a level. Even so, she worked furiously to get her level up.

She thought that she had talent for the game because she was leveling up more quickly than others. However, later on when she began her job as a host for the Royal Road program in the evening, she had to give up more time to stay at her job. Meeting peers and making friends was necessary

too.

‘I will have a wonderful adventure as well’

Maylon dreamed of a future filled with adventures. A righteous ranger helping others in times of crisis!

Until now, she was only able to talk about the adventures of others during her broadcasts. She was envious of them, and then decided that she wanted to have her own adventure to tell.

“But this stone is too heavy.” Maylon said in despair

Her eyes filled with large tears that were ready to fall at a moment’s notice.

Maylon didn’t have much strength. She invested almost all of her stat points in dexterity, as it was more useful for hunting in the mountainous areas where Rangers would usually be active. Thanks to her exceptionally low strength, the stone seemed heavier.

“Uuwah!”

It was so heavy that she was about to collapse. Willpower was keeping her from falling, but her physical strength had reached its limit and she risked being squashed by the stone at any moment.

“Are you okay?”

A hand kept the stone Maylon held steady. She lifted her head and saw another archer that had reached out to help her. His expression was no different from hers.

Rangers and Archers use bows as their main weapon, so dexterity was their main attribute.

Small streams of sweat ran down his forehead from the effort. Nevertheless, he stopped to help Maylon.

“I’m fine... It must be hard on you.”

“It’s okay, the destination is close, so let me help you.”

“But you don’t look so good...”

“I’ll manage” The archer said as he sweat profusely.

Usually, a favor of this degree wouldn’t impress her. But in this situation, when the archer was struggling to be able to barely support himself, this simple act of kindness touched her heart.

“Ummm... What’s your name? My name’s Maylon. Don’t get me wrong, I was hoping we could be friends and exchange whispers from time to time...”

“Pale, my name is Pale.”

Maylon and Pale smiled at each other as sweat streamed down their faces.

Chapter 2: The Pyramid and the Dignity of the King

At the construction site, Weed was cooking grass porridge and handing it out to workers for free.

"Good work, take your time and eat it slowly"

"Thank you."

Exhausted from carrying stones, players took the bowl of porridge with gratitude.

Stamina has increased by 35
Hunger has been relieved.
Thirst has been quenched.

Intermediate 4 Cooking Skill and Intermediate 9 Handicraft!

It was no wonder that porridge made by Weed was delicious. Although he has neglected his cooking skills lately, the enhancement of the food was still ample.

People liked and respected Weed.

They were thankful not only for sharing his quest, he had also cooked free food for them.

Though the ingredients used, were literally grass, and was boiled to look like porridge, after receiving a bowl of boiling porridge, they gave their heartfelt thanks to Weed.

Among those who participated in the quest, some had really low levels and had little money. Weed had to cook grass porridge for these workers for free, and the players were thankful that they were able to work without dying from hunger.

Along with providing food, Weed also kept an eye on the atmosphere of the construction site. No matter how good-natured these people were, any complaints can grow into a strike, bringing an end to the construction.

Such as being comfortable or lazy after being provided for, or from being full.

The main force behind the construction were the low-level players. They were more interested in the reward, and so worked harder. Watching them, other players unconsciously matched their speed.

"Thank you very much, Weed."

The girl, who just finished her serving, heartily thanked Weed. This cute little girl looked to be a 10th grade high school student.

"You're welcome, I'm happy you liked it." Weed responded with a smile.

Today, he had already given tens of thousands of such smiles. No matter how friendly you are, smiling so much wasn't easy. No wonder Weed's smile looked pretty strained! His eyes were smiling, but lips was slightly crooked, making his smile looked mocking. Nevertheless his voice was friendly.

"Lemon, you've moved 8 stones already!"

"Oh, you remember me?"

"Of course. You're one of those wonderful people, who praised my porridge with such pleasure... the sun isn't down yet, and if you manage to bring 1 or 2 more stones, you'll be one of those who worked the most today."

"Oh? I see. And I was just about to stop... I'll be right back!" The young girl Lemon, diligently ran towards the quarry.

After eating Weed's grass porridge, all the players felt energized, and became even more determined to carry stones to make the tomb. Though his porridge was called 'grass porridge', it wasn't made from grass alone!

Even if prepared by such a great cook like Weed, if you eat the same dish, you'll get fed up eventually. So, from time to time he was adding some meat and other ingredients, spending about 100 gold a day. Weed considered those expenses as investments to improve the level of his cooking skill!

Even though his dishes lacked refinement, since he cooked it in tremendous amounts, his cooking skill rose constantly.

Weed would have probably lost a lot of sleep if he had to lose 100 gold daily. Since the moment he started playing the game, he had been money grubbing over every single copper, trying to reach his goal as soon as possible.

But now the situation is a little different. Weed had hired workers to build the tomb, so he has to watch the process and bear the costs!

'No helping it. I won't be able to build it without their help, so I have to buy food and take care of them.' The thoughts of a dedicated, charitable businessman.

His facial expression, confident voice, and concern for the people—all of it created an image of an adult man.

However, Weed's true feelings were similar to a vicious python awaiting its prey.

'Eat fast so I can put you to work as fast as much as possible. Received 100,000 gold as operation costs for this quest, money spent so far is 700 gold so 99,300 gold still remains. In addition, earned more than 10,000 gold from the participation fees. Ultimately, it will be a surplus.'

Excessive labor! Exploitation! Eating grass porridge with a rotten smile while exhaustively putting them to work, vicious boss Weed!

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On the Royal Road website, the construction of the tomb became prominent topic for discussion. And someone kindled the flames even more by posting another article.

Topic: People busy on the tomb construction.

Greetings.

Last time I posted a topic about a 'B' rank difficulty quest. Now I want to show you a short video from the construction site.

Please watch it.

He had recorded a video of what he had seen with his own eyes and

posted it on the Internet.

Fresh news about the construction of the Royal Tomb!

Some people who had no interest in the event thus far were also intrigued. The moment they pressed the 'play' button, they saw what was an astonishing scene well beyond their imagination was.

Young boys and girls were grabbing heavy blocks of stones and carrying them on their shoulders.

"Unni, it's heavy."

"Hold on a little longer. In order to complete the quest, we must deliver it."

Emotional conversation between sisters!

Even the elderly carried stones. Thousands of people, regardless of age and gender were transporting stones. Sometimes players would get crushed beneath the stones. To add to their pain, the stones they carried collapsed and turned into rubble.

People, who watched the video, had their mouths hanging from shock.

What the hell is this!

'Is this a concentration camp or execution ground?'

In the distance, behind the working people, Serabourg was visible.

- This is the reality of sculpting.
- It was wise that I did not to select Sculptor.
- We need to raise money to donate to our unfortunate neighbors who started at the frontier kingdom.

Envy and jealousy towards players who were able to participate in the B rank quest for 1 gold was over.

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Over time, blocks of stones were piled up at the tomb's construction site. The whole process took a lot of manpower and to cut and carry the stones

from the quarry. The entire place was surrounded by all kinds of rocks enough to build the tomb!

Different kinds of stones were necessary to build the tomb of the King. The interior and exterior of the tomb will be built out of stones with different colors and shapes. If not for thousands of players who cooperated, it would have been impossible.

"We really did it."

"Heu-heuk I'm impressed."

Many players started crying from excitement. One of the hardest jobs they ever had to do was over. However, the tomb is yet to be built. It's the start of a full scale construction.

Klang! Klang! Klang!

The moment enough stones were accumulated, Weed started to work.

Using a hammer and chisel, he was smoothing the uneven surfaces of the stones and then using his sculpture mastery to shape them and place them on their permanent location.

Weed was lucky that he chose a simplistic design to build a large tomb. If he had attempted to make something of greater complexity, it would require more work.

"What kind of tomb is he building?"

All the players, who participated in mining and delivery of the stones were watching with interest.

While Weed was engraving the stones, other players helped piled up the completed product neatly to their designated places. Unexpectedly, this part of the construction went very smoothly, thanks to the help of the guilds in Rosenheim Kingdom.

Guilds, especially the ones from the center of the continent, were well developed and had larger manpower. Official guilds became a large group that made a lot of profit. Guild can save money and buy the ownership, or claim a market as their possession, which allows them to raise even more

money and increase their properties.

If the guild has possession of a castle, they would have more possibilities of earning a bigger profit. Commercial taxes can be collected on a weekly basis and can be invested on various technologies to create more diverse local shops, and most importantly, purchase assorted goods for bargain price.

In addition, local craftsmen would be able to start producing weapons and armors of greater quality and rarity. Therefore, most guilds invest all of their assets into trades, and craftsmen of those fields compete with each other.

The better the guild's business is going, the more players would want to join, and the wealthier the guild grew.

Some guilds became widely respected for their virtuous actions, benefiting not only them, but general population as well. Sometimes such guilds started from small villages, and end up building their own castle.

Other areas, where guilds could direct their efforts was mining. Naturally, if they were to find a rich gold deposit during the work in the mines, it would not only improve the guild's wealth, but also the region's welfare in general.

However, most of the mines were infested by dangerous monsters, so before a guild could start mining, it had to gather forces to clear them out. Not only guild members were able to participate in the clearing of the mines, but even other player parties, given they have the guild's approval. In that case, players were getting a job to clear the mine in form of a quest.

No wonder the guilds, especially those from the center of the continent, were having a constant struggle with each other. But in Rosenheim Kingdom, guilds newly formed. This is the perfect situation to take advantage of!

The edge of the continent was mostly populated by new players, and they were the ones who created the first guilds of Rosenheim Kingdom. Therefore, even if a guild was to discover an unoccupied mine, they weren't able to claim ownership, as they didn't have enough reputation points within the kingdom.

Those guilds didn't have much money, so for them, the unexpected opportunity to participate in the construction of the royal tomb with Weed was like a rain in a desert.

"We agree to any conditions."

"Leave it to us."

Before he distributed the work amongst guilds, he contacted his master by whispering him.

- Erm... I'm talking to Ika guild, should I share the quest with them?

- ...

Not long ago Ika Guild had ambushed and killed all the Geomchis. Of course Weed knew of that incident and decided to contact his master. For a few moments there was only silence. Then the unexpected response came: - Give them work.

- Wouldn't it be better to refuse?

- No real man should be narrow-minded. Men should have a big heart and tolerance. Wouldn't that be a nobler act?

- If so, then...

- If they ask for work - give them work. Now excuse me, I'm busy.

Others wouldn't show such generosity as the Geomchi did towards the Ika Guild. They were enemies, who had killed each other. To show such generosity when an opportunity for revenge arises - is a really hard and noble decision. But Weed knew his master better.

'How much could they offend Master... If he doesn't want to use other people for revenge. He wants to avenge them in person... Only then will he calm down.'

Weed equally divided the work between guilds in Rosenheim Kingdom. Then he proceeded to build the tomb with help from highly cooperative guild players.

At the base of the tomb, blocks were placed in a square, which was

gradually growing upward. But every next level had smaller scale. The higher it went, the smaller were levels.

"Ah! This is..."

At that moment, people who were busy with construction, along with those who were hauling stones, became aware of the kind of tomb that was being built.

"It's a pyramid!"

"He's building a pyramid for the King!"

Once described as a scientific and technological architectural building, is now being constructed right in front of their eyes.

However, it was not a facet of the ancient myths and legends of a pyramid. The internal structure was much simpler, because Weed had no experience with construction such as this.

Sculpture mastery in game only assisted with the improvement of outer appearance and shape. It was no wonder that Weed didn't have any knowledge on the internal structure of a pyramid.

'How is this supposed to look like?...'

Weed had been thinking about it ever since he decided on the outer appearance, but he still didn't have an answer. Therefore, there were no labyrinth, secret passages, or any other mysteries.

Of course Weed could have gotten a map of internal structure of a pyramid from the internet. But it'd take a lot more time to recreate such complicated labyrinth system. That's why Weed decided to use his imagination.

When he was a kid, before his parents died, he remembered how they briefly lived in an apartment. 30 flat apartment! And from those memories, he modeled interior of the tomb.

It looked like a pyramid from outside, but from the inside, it was a normal 3-room flat with 2 bathrooms. In other words, an ordinary Korean flat. Of course, Weed wasn't planning to add a balcony or terrace.

However, construction was already in progress and it was too late to reconsider.

The interior was so simple that the entrance passage and the left side of the room was decorated with nothing but stones that were already piled up. Yet other rooms and the bathroom were decorated with works of art.

While working, many people began asking questions. And Pale and girls were no exception.

"Is a bathroom really necessary inside a pyramid?"

"..."

"There's no water here..."

"..."

"Do dead need to take a shower?"

"Ahem! Minds of great artist do not follow common sense. How can ordinary people understand the thoughts of Da Vinci? Before you try and understand an artist's intentions, you should look at the flow and the essence of nature."

"Then you should install a bath too, Weed."

"..."

*

Inside the pyramid, there was a room for a coffin, a living room, and 2 other rooms for art works. The latter was provided by Mapan, who personally rushed over and purchased those items at a cheap price.

During the construction Weed had only spent 1600 gold on ingredients for grass porridge. Only vicious businessmen such as Weed would be able to organize a large scale construction without having to pay their workers.

Even on the art works for interior decoration, he had spent 49,700 gold. He could have saved on the decorations as well, but decided that successful completion of the quest was more important.

'If I make a mistake I might fail.'

A simple monster hunting quest would always give him a second chance. If he was to die, he'd always be able to return in a day and start over. But this time he couldn't afford any failures. It's all or nothing.

He purchased the best and most expensive carpet and laid it out in the living room, and on the walls he hung paintings. And of course, he had also placed a few self-made sculptures inside.

However, the pyramid was still not giving off the vibe he envisioned!

The number of unused blocks was decreasing as the pyramid's height got higher, however he had a feeling that there was something still lacking.

Although the size was enormous and magnificent, it was still insufficient. The pyramid that was being built wasn't giving an impression of it being a tomb of a great King who ruled Serabourg.

The tomb of a prestigious King should be elegant and insinuate great power. A simple tomb was far too inadequate. A tomb of a King should be iconic and easily identified. The tomb still lacking something essential to project such impression.

"Aha! That's what it's missing."

Weed ordered a huge natural rock to be delivered to the pyramid. Large rocks were placed on top of each other, making it almost as large as the pyramid.

He already had experience hanging down on ropes to create sculptures of greater height. However, the material was very different. Stone is harder than ice, so it was going to take a lot of work.

Hit, crack, and slice the rock!

For several days, without stopping for a break, he hung at a great altitude holding on his engraving knife.

Creating a gigantic statue wasn't complicated, it was rather simple. No elegant lines and fine details were needed! The statue itself was overwhelmed by its size.

For the head of the statue, he carved the face of Kind Theodarren, and its body was shaped into a lion. The design was simple, but enormous in size. And this monstrous statue was carved out of the single rock.

*

Current King, Theodarren, had restored the peripheral Kingdom of Rosenheim, which suffered from constant monster invasions.

He won the war against an old enemy, Brent Kingdom, and had established and trained a large army, which became the foundation of peace and prosperity.

*

The King himself had told the tale with pride.

Weed remembered everything he was told. When you work on a sculpture, you can't base it on the outward appearance alone. The appearance is important, but the feelings the sculptor has put into his creation, were just as important. Because they are what they will pass on the essences that is portrayed by the object, to future generations.

Sometimes feelings have great power. Music, created by outstanding composers, can make people cry or laugh. Similar with books and paintings. If they were created without feelings, they are an incomplete work, and will be quickly forgotten.

King Theodarren told him a lot about his life, and Weed didn't forget his stories. He was mistaken when he thought it was just a prelude to the quest. Only now, when he was working on the sculpture, he understood how important those stories were, and that he wouldn't be able to create a sculpture without them.

'In the body of a lion, swift, and versatile, yet a profound heart.

Longevity of the King. Embodying the aura of might that can overwhelm any audience.

When he makes his move, even the most formidable opponent trembles in fear because of their predator's menacing steps.

The Lion acts as a protector of the citizens of Kingdom of Rosenheim.'

This poem was included with the statue of the lion.

The statue of the Lion overlooking the pyramid represents King's final resting place. Finally,overbearing eyes were carved to complete the statue.

Ding!

Masterpiece! You created a Statue of the Lion Monster.

Created by a Sculptor with excellent handicraft skills, and the solidification of his sweat and effort. His fame and reputation will be spread throughout the continent.

The statue of the Lion:

The statue of the Lion is made out of solid granite, and has a strong and courageous temperament. This statue, resembling King Theodarren, will bring prosperity to the Kingdom of Rosenheim.

Artistic value: 4,700.

Effects:

- Those who access the statue will gain the Lion's Courage buff, increasing Health and Mana regeneration by 30% for a day.
- Movement speed increased by 15%.
- Magic resistance increased by 20%.
- Maximum health increased by 15%.
- Stamina increased by 20%.
- All stats increased by 16.

Lion's Roar applied:

- All monsters in the surrounding area will receive a decrease in their abilities and will lose morale.
- Fighting spirit of players will increase when fighting near the statue:

This effect does not overlap with other sculptures.

Total number of masterpieces completed: 3

Sculpture mastery reached Intermediate 9th level. This allows construction of even more delicate and detailed sculptures.

Handicraft Skill reached Intermediate level 10, and transformed to Advanced level 1.

- You gain a bonus when using hand tools and an increase in damage with all weapons.
- You can now learn certain skills related to the craft.
- Hand combat skills can now be learned regardless of profession.

New Skill: Mind Hand

- Fame increased by 630.
- Art increased by 16.
- Endurance increased by 12.
- Stamina increased by 6.
- The Lion has been added to the list of the Wonders of the East.
- Weed is the owner of the Lion. If life is given to the Lion, it will begin with a high loyalty towards Weed.
- You have created a Masterpiece. You gain 1 point in each stat.

New Title! You earned a title of 'Artisan With Exceptional Dexterity'.

- Granted for reaching the master level of Handicraft skill!
- Honorable title for having extraordinary dexterity.
- Granted only to the best artisan.

Weed, who was clinging on the lion's face, burst into laughter.

"AHahaha!" His spoiled rotten smile changed into a genuine one.

Ordinary people would always admire the first person to achieve master status!

In this case it was the Handicraft Skill. The marvelously complex hand movements, that can't be imagined by general public!

'I finally reached the advanced level!'

Mind Hand skill. It was obtained together with advanced level handicraft, so it must be exceptional.

Weed checked the acquired skill.

"Check skill, Mind Hand!"

Mind Hand:

After achieving a near-legendary level of dexterity, you can summon a "third hand" using your mind.

Using the "third hand", it is possible to manipulate objects and even attack enemies.

However, it is not possible for your "third hand" to use any skills.

Mana consumption per second: 2

For a small amount of mana, he will be able to summon an additional hand. It'd be able to hold a carving knife or other tools. When working on a tall statue, the skill would be very useful to him. But it can't be used to apply skills in battles.

'Depending on how I use it, it may be of a great asset to me.'

To become an adept sculptor, one has to triumph over constant challenges and overcome many difficulties. And having created another Masterpiece Sculpture brought unspeakable joy to Weed as received enormous amount of stat bonus.

Sculptors get stronger by adding up little bonuses to make one significant increase. Masterpieces, however, gave a much greater bonuses, as they were rarely produced, but it didn't make a great significant

increase.

Creating a masterpiece also gave Endurance, Stamina and Art attributes. Although those stats did help to survive in a battle and create new artwork, it didn't give much benefit when it comes to battles unlike Strength, Agility, Wisdom and Intellect.

Those Attributes were only growing by 1 point. That's why, no matter how great the created sculpture was, it wasn't making him much stronger.

*

While Weed was hanging from the sculpture, a large crowd had gathered near the base of the statue.

Carving a sculpture out of natural rocks was very difficult!

Most of the audience anxious and afraid, seeing as that Weed had stayed up there for a couple of days without food or drink, hammering on the rock.

It was a huge rock, so there wasn't any significant change in one given day.

However, their fear slowly changed to excitement, as the statue's shape was gradually being formed. Until finally, the Lion statue was finished, radiating brilliance. Majestic and powerful! The embodiment of King of Rosenheim!

It also granted a variety of effects to those who saw it.

"My Stamina has increased!"

"My Health..."

"Everyone, check out your stats!"

Players were opening their Status Windows and staring at them in shock. Until now most of the players thought that they could only raise their attribute points with certain items or buffs from Mages, Priests and Bards.

Now they realized, that sculptors could raise stats as well. Some of them

already knew about effects of sculptures, but none of them had ever seen the absurd amount of effects of the lion statue.

"All stat attributes had increased..."

"Even magic resistance!"

"A day! The bonus will be working for a whole day! I think all parties will be visiting this lion before hunt from now on."

"Hmmm... The Sculptor profession seems useful."

After seeing lion's statue people's impression of the sculptor profession were changed.

'I should befriend some sculptors!'

None of them wanted to actually change their profession to sculptor. However, after witnessing a sculptor at work, they understood what they had to undergo.

No matter how alluring the sculptor profession was to them at that moment, no one actually wanted to put out the effort required. It was much easier to just get acquainted with one.

Yet, more new information continued appearing.

"Lion's Roar! It says it greatly increases the fighting spirit stat."

"What is the purpose of fighting spirit anyway..."

"Don't you know? The stronger level you are, the more your enemies' skills weaken. However, that works in reverse too. So the higher your fighting spirit stat is, the less your skills get reduced Main reason for players gathering into parties was to hunt stronger monsters that they could hunt alone. The most common cause of such parties failing was their lack of fighting spirit. However even if it was high, it wouldn't ensure you a victory.

Usually, lower level players have to team up against the stronger monsters. However, with the increase provided by the statue, it allows the player to fight against stronger monsters on a more equal footing.

As the crowd buzzed about the stats provided by the statue, many of the Clans' message boards were overflowing with people talking about the Sculptor class.

- Guildmaster, I have found an amazing profession...

- Sculptor profession wasn't such a useless as we thought.

All the guilds started to make plans to recruit the sculptor, Weed. Meanwhile Weed was just hanging from the sculpture, overflowing with emotions.

Intermediate 9 Sculpture Mastery! Advanced level Handicraft!

Truly, the 'Artisan With Exceptional Dexterity' title wasn't given him for nothing. Usually game was granting more generic titles, like 'someone, who finished this task' or 'Someone, who hunted this rare monster'.

However, crafting skills had its own feature in assigning titles. The most important title could only be acquired by the best artisan on the continent. By the first person who reached the Advanced level in a certain crafting skills!

That fact the Weed was the first player to reach the advanced handicraft skill, it would be a small milestone in the Legend of Weed.

*

Pale greeted his friends and introduced Maylon.

"Hello. My name is Maylon. I'm a ranger and Pale's girlfriend."

"Nice to meet you."

Surka, Irene and Romuna greeted her with warm smiles as they welcome their new colleague.

Although Pale had a crush on Romuna for some time, as they were childhood friends, Pale found his true love with Maylon.

Comment: Really? Considering how he met her, the most he could fall in love with is her ass. (She was carrying a stone on her back in front of him! That's not very romantic...) - IcedLance A man in love always looks

confident and relaxed once he wins over his beloved. Romuna was first to notice this change and already knew what they were going to say.

"We haven't known each other for long, but we are in love."

"I am really glad I met Pale."

They said as they exchanged affectionate glances.

Understanding between lovers.

Suddenly Surka who was looking intently at Maylon's face exclaimed:

"Oh! Your face looks really familiar, have I seen you before?"

"Come to think of it, I think I've seen you before too..."

"Yeah. I've seen you lots of times... although your face is subtly different."

Irene and Romuna started staring at Maylon as well. They were sure, that they had met her for the first time in game. And yet, she still looked familiar.

Pale also started wondering.

"To be honest, I think I've saw you somewhere too."

Maylon fought away her hesitation and decided to reveal herself to them.

"Do you watch any programs associated with Royal Road."

"Eh? Oh! Come to think of it..."

"That's right, I'm Shin Hye Min."

After realizing that, Maylon's companions couldn't hide their astonishment.

"Sorry, I didn't intend to hide it, but didn't want to bother you. Didn't want to be subjected to prejudice..."

Maylon continued explaining, but no one was paying any attention.

"It's amazing to meet the anchor of one of the most Royal Road's popular shows."

"Didn't know program coordinators actually plays Royal Road."

"But your face on the screen looks a little different."

"I know. I didn't recognize her at first too."

"Stupid. They apply a lot of make-up on television."

"Oh! I see. But you're still pretty, Unni!"

"Th... thank you."

A program host and an entertainer were slightly different. An announcer of a broadcasting station was a similar concept.

"Say, do you hear of any secret information, unknown to the general public through work?"

"Well, sometimes. I'm just a host, so I know a little more than everyone else."

"Does your company give you any equipment?"

"Rarely. But that does happen sometimes."

"Wow! I'm envious. So why do you like Pale."

"I just realized the moment i met him, that he was my man."

Then Romuna suddenly asked:

"But is it ok for a TV show host to play games like this?"

"Well, I do have to gather information..."

"Information... about the pyramid? We can ask Weed for an exclusive interview anytime if you want. Should we?"

"No, but thanks, I'll have to refuse."

Maylon smiled brightly.

"I didn't get close to Pale to gain something."

"Maylon, you..."

Pale was touched by Maylon's words and smiled.

"Don't look at me like that. It's natural. But talking about business, I'd

like to ask Weed for an interview, but that might offend him."

"..."

At that moment Pale and Surka realized how mistaken Maylon was.

'That certainly won't...'

'She doesn't know Weed at all.'

*

Lately a lot of guild representatives were coming to the construction site to meet Weed.

At first they were bragging about the advantages of being in a guild, while they actively tried to recruit him.

"Our guild is the biggest in Rosenheim. In this kingdom there's no one more influential or powerful than us. You won't regret if you join us."

"We will not only buy your sculptures at a reasonable price, but pay you a daily wage. And if you ever decide to go hunting, we'll accept you into a party without delay and provide equipment."

"Don't you by any chance want to leave this cramped kingdom and move to the center of the continent? I know you already received many offers, but ours has the best conditions..."

All those representatives were looking at Weed with superiority. They promised various benefits, like power leveling to level 200. They automatically assumed that artisan professions were all low levelled.

But Weed wasn't an ordinary artisan. His level was a lot higher than those of other players of crafting related professions. Also in all the offers he saw more restrictions, than advantages.

All the guilds wanted to have exclusive rights to his sculptures, and if they were providing equipment for hunting, they demanded them returned. Even if he was to agree and take rare and unique items to the hunt, he could end up with more trouble, than benefits. Weed had only hunted in most dangerous places. Every battle could lead to his death, and as a result to the loss of items, lent to him.

And Weed's strategy in general was aimed at fast levelling and auctioning the expensive items. Guilds would be more of a hindrance in those matters.

"Sorry, but I can't take your offer." Weed had rejected every offer.

The better the benefits of the offer, implied to him that the restrictions were tighter.

Constantly making sculptures just to be let into some guild's hunting parties...

Never! He'd become more famous and sell more works for greater money in the future.

After getting all their offers rejected, guilds resigned and gradually calmed down.

'Anyway, he's just a sculptor. Moreover you can't increase the bonus by using other sculptures.'

'One sculpture isn't enough, is it?'

'This is a big sculpture, and you can't claim it all for yourself. Other sculptures with bonus effects must be big as well and it wouldn't be possible to carry them.'

'Effects only last for a day. We can't be returning every day to our guild to look at the statue.'

They decided to acknowledge Weed's decision, as they started to understand sculpture profession a bit. Players like Weed must be constantly in motion, creating artwork in various corners of the continent. It wouldn't be possible to stay in one place and just create items, like other craftsmen.

After finishing the Lion statue Weed switched back to working on the pyramid. A lot of things were already done, but it was still far from being complete.

The higher the pyramid became, the harder it was for players to deliver stone blocks to the top of it. They even had to make a huge ramp with dirt

and sand, and a lot of players used it to slowly carry the huge stone blocks to the top of the pyramid.

Chapter 3: The Power of Alcohol

The Geomchis were seriously considering changing their names.

"We've been wandering here for a month already."

"Yeah, let us be known as 'The Lost' now. What do you think?"

Clueless beginners who have never before played videogames, they thought that they have already adapted to Royal Road. But they were mistaken.

Geomchis were more or less able to navigate familiar areas, but in the lands to the south of the Rosenheim Kingdom there immediately got lost and were wandering in search of a road. It was then when they heard news of Weeds return to the fortress Serabourg.

Master's eyes shone coldly.

"Finally I will meet the disciple in-game."

"Master, we also want to see Weed very much!"

All the students were of the same mind.

"Come on, let's go see him!"

The Geomchis then left for their long journey back to Seraboug's Palace.

"I think it's this way. Master!"

"We'll get there faster if we go this way."

"Huh? We passed this place earlier..."

Although the Geomchis started their way back to the moment Weed returned to Serabourg, it took them weeks of wandering to finally reach the capital of Rosenheim.

The first thing they saw upon arrival, where multiple players working in sweat.

Geomchi49 looked at them and laughed.

"That's not the way to apply strength."

Geomchi16 Also started laughing.

"To swing a pick-axe like that... That's science. Science!"

"They are so tired that they wouldn't even be able to hammer a nail properly."

"We must help them"

"Whooo OooH!"

Geomchis were completely unaware of the rewards! They just took off their clothes, grabbed picks and started mining stones.

The average level of players who were busy at the construction was higher than that of Geomchis, and many had higher strength, agility and other stats than them. But that didn't matter to Geomchis as they wasted no time and began working.

"To swing a pick, you need not strength but skill."

"Let's show those damn rookies how it's done."

"Yeah. Leave it to us."

Weed, Pale, Surka, Irene, Romuna and recently joined Maylon were resting.

It was the 2nd time after Laviass that they got together, the last time they weren't able to talk much as Weed was dragged away by the soldiers to meet with the King.

The construction of the pyramid got on track, so they finally found the time to get together and talk.

Like the last time, Weed was asked to cook something tasty.

So now he was cooking kimchijeon with lemonade.

At first one would think that they would not fit each other, but Pale, Surka and others were eating so fast that the food Weed was making was disappearing instantly.

Seeing his friends have such an appetite, he could not help but smile.

"Want more?"

"Yes!"

"10 servings please!" Maylon exclaimed and raised her hands with spread fingers in indication.

Pale and Surka looked back at her in surprise, and Maylon replied with a smile.

"After all, no matter how much you eat in Royal Road, you won't get fat. So i'll eat as much as i can. It's hard to watch your weight. But you you are really full of surprises, Weed. Not only you are a skilled sculptor, but also a good cook. You'll be popular with girls."

"You bet, Weed is an amazing cook. He already cooked many tasty things for us, Maylon."

"Aw, Pale..."

Pale and Maylon's cooing was giving them goosebumps.

'Didn't know they're like that...'

The sugary-sweet voice of Pale... and the responding murmur of Maylon. That's a really sweet couple of cockroaches.

"I'm gonna be sick."

"And they're that way all the time."

Friends finished kimchijeon², and got up. They rested well and ate delicious food, but they couldn't spend more time idling, it was time to do some work at the construction of the pyramid or to hunt monsters.

Recently the four friends, were often sneaking of the construction site to use the benefits of the Lion sculpture and to hunt nearby goblins. Because of that they had to work real hard to keep up with other players.

That made up for a tight schedule, but everyone in the group got almost five levels, and even Irene reached level 225 now. Pale, Surka and Romuna were now at level 232, just 20 levels behind Weed.

Slowly stretching Pale muttered with irony.

"For the last couple of days I had a nosebleed five times."

"Seven for me" Surka replied.

"But you do not feel dizzy at least," Irene said, and after some thought added "The nose i just keep plugged. And in the subway, all the people around me look like goblins... I get confused if I'm in the game or reality."

"..."

Weed and others looked at Irene, dumbfounded.

'Good thing she is a priest.'

Surka was a monk so were she to get confused like that, she might attack people with her fists. Thankfully, Irene wasn't a fighter, she was only supporting other players in the party with holy spells.

The past few day were difficult for friends, so in the real world, they were all greatly fatigued and in a state of disarray.

There weren't many people like Weed who are able to sleep for 4 hours a day and play Royal Road the rest of the time. Weed didn't feel any consequences of playing the game so much.

'Playing Royal Road is a hundred times better than, say, spend entire year working in a dusty cramped room, sewing doll's eyes or dyeing clothes.'

Weed was being shaken just by memories of that time. A tiny, dusty to the point that it was hard to breath room, and the dyes used were so dangerous that after working with it for a while red spots appeared on the skin.

Back then he had to quit working and go through a long, expensive treatment at a nearby hospital. It was then, when Weed realized that no matter what, you should always keep your body healthy.

Though most of his time was dedicated to Royal Road, in the gaps he was always doing exercises.

And to sleep well he was chanting in his head before going to sleep:

'I can sleep well.'

'I will sleep well.'

'I'll sleep for 4 hours and wake up rested.'

'I'll have beautiful dreams.'

To an outsider it would seem like a meaningless chatter, but to Lee Hyun these phrases have become some sort of a prayer and had unexpectedly strong effect. He would sleep well, and filled with energy he would rush to new conquests in Royal Road.

To be honest, Lee Hyun was only able to sleep so well since not long ago. More than 10 years he was in constant fear of the loan sharks. In those circumstances there was no place for a good sleep.

Only after paying off the debt he now had the opportunity so save up money for his family. Because of that Lee Hyun was able to let go of his fears and to start enjoying his life.

After dinner, his friends decided to go hunt for monsters. What could be better than hunting with people you can entrust with your life?

But then they were approached by five men. That were Geomchis.

"Take us with you."

Geomchi and the Four Geomchi's did not participate in the construction of the tomb.

It wasn't good for seniors' reputation to do the work of a student.

So they went to meet Weed and arrived just in time to see them preparing to go to hunt.

"Let us come too."

"We will not be a burden, believe me."

Not long ago, Geomchi's changed their profession to Martial Artists.

Thanks to that, they not only got a significant increase to their attack power, but also the ability to use all kinds of weapons in the game.

Most students were at 180th level, but Teacher with instructors had level over 200. All thanks to the fact that they were not engaged in any business, except for hunting, so they were raising levels at an amazing speed.

Besides, lately they started taking quests, though not very complicated ones, the ones that were easy to figure out. Such tasks mostly required to kill someone or to collect some items.

"Okay. Let's go together"

Weed, of course, was happy to that they participated. Royal Road was not a game where you could hunt with just anybody.

Unlike older video games that used mouse, virtual reality games were more focused on working together as a group. From the way you move and react to changing situations depend lives of other people in party.

That is why those who fought well in reality in Royal Road had more confidence in battle. Nothing can be done about it. As a smart man can always use their brains to make good decisions, a well trained one could use his good reflexes and fighting skill while hunting monsters.

In some way, virtual reality was closer to life. Because of this, sometimes those who do not know how to fight under difficult and stressful conditions, were considered a burden by party leaders.

Of course, most of players were starting without any knowledge about fighting, but they gradually gained experience and were becoming more and more skilled fighters.

It was during this period of 'learning' when it mattered most who your friends were in game and reality. And how they treat you.

But all these problems of newcomers did not belong to the top five Geomchi's , as they were the best. First, Second, Third, Fourth and Fifth Geomchi! True masters of the blade, in real life and in the game.

Weed had no doubts in their fighting abilities. Moreover, he was very eager to look at the techniques of Martial Artists.

Together with joined Geomchis they were a big and dangerous party.

They decided to rent horses as the hunting ground was pretty far away. It was suggested by Pale, and as his knowledge of Royal Road was vast, Weed had no reason to doubt him.

"Where are we going? What kind of place takes two hour to travel on a horse?"

"We're going to the gorge of Huntresses. They're monsters of level 280, they gather in groups of two or three and go hunting. It's a dangerous place. I only read about them, never actually been there.

After the Pale's words Weed recalled some information about Huntresses too. They were Amazon warriors, were good with swords, spears and whips!

"I see. And what kind of place is that?"

"A gorge. Once we go in, the hunt will begin. In fact, there is one feature about Huntresses. They never attack the moment players enter their lands. They always wait, closely watching trespassers, waiting until they reach the heart of the gorge, and then begin to attack the party in small groups. So until you kill all the attacking Huntresses, you won't be able to leave the gorge."

"So it's either we kill them all or they kill us?"

"Yes. This is a very dangerous place."

Thus, while having a conversation, they reached the gorge of Huntresses.

"Hmm... Looks dangerous" Surka examined surrounding cliffs warily.

Huntresses, dressed in black light robes, were hiding at the top of the cliff sides behind trees and bushes. Although they were trying to stay unnoticed, Weed and other members of the squad were alert so they could keep track of them.

"That's right, they don't attack."

"Yes. They will attack later, after all the reinforcements arrive."

"And if we attack them now?"

"It's useless. If we noticed them, it means that we are already surrounded."

"We have to prepare for battle."

Weed threw the bag on the ground and took out the tools.

"Weed, what are you doing?"

At the Irene's question Weed just reached out his hand.

"Give me your weapons and armor."

"Huh?"

"I need to prepare them before the fight starts."

"Eeeeeeh, ok."

Then Weed's friends recalled that his blacksmith and tailor skills were at intermediate level, so they began to approach him one by one and giving him their equipment.

It was time to do some work. Weed sharpened swords, polished armor and ironed clothes!

To Maylon his actions seemed mysterious, and she quietly asked Pale:

"What's Weed doing?"

When they decided to hunt and took a sculptor with them, she naturally thought that Weed was invited, because he was their friend and needed help to grow. After all, everyone knew that the people with crafting professions had a hard time raising their levels as they were bad fighters.

However, from the very beginning Pale, Romuna and others made Weed the party leader. His opinion was the most important.

Maylon worked at a TV-Media station, so she thought she could grasp any situation very quickly, but now she was very confused and did not understand what was going on.

Weed made it even more confusing, making all kinds of strange actions.

He ironed clothes, sharpened their swords and polished armor!

Pale with a smile explained it to her:

"It may be hard to believe, but Weed has intermediate blacksmith level."

"What?!"

To say that Maylon was very surprised would be an understatement. On the entire Bersa continent there were few blacksmiths with an intermediate skill level. She could not believe that the intermediate level sculptor has a developed blacksmithing skill as well.

"Well, don't be so surprised. In addition to blacksmithing skill, Weed has..."

Pale wanted to continue, but was a bit too late. Weed buffed the equipment of the rest of the party and turned to Maylon. A little hesitant, she gave him her bow.

"Wow! What a nice bow."

After seeing the weapon, Weed was surprised.

Unique Item!

'It could be sold for at least 10 thousand dollars ...'

Weed's eyes glowed with greed. It was not easy to get a unique object in Royal Road.

Maylon was very worried, and Weed, after struggling with his greed for a bit, slowly adjusted the string and worked on the overall elasticity of the bow.

When Maylon got her weapon back, she became astounded.

Two-handed bow of High Elf Venus: Durability: 40/40. Attack: 75. Range: 16.

With a shot from this bow you can easily pick off the crows of misfortune. The string is made from the hair of High Elf. Brings good luck and reduces morale of the enemy.

Requirements:

- Level 230
- Agility 700
- Only for Rangers

Effects:

- Strength +15
- Agility +20
- Accuracy +60
- Empower skill Quick Shot +25%
- Burns 3 mana to enemy hit
- Hit rate for slow enemies is 100%

Bow was in hands of a skilled craftsman:

Applied effects:

- Strength +10
- Attack +9
- Agility +15
- Accuracy +16
- +10% skills empowerment
- The firing range is increased by 5

"Wow!"

Maylon repeatedly checked her bow.

Weed just work a little on it, and the stats got increased by about 20 percent!

"So that's what the blacksmith with an average skill level can do..."

This bow Maylon got as a gift. Although the durability of a weapon was small, it was not a big disadvantage as unlike swords you didn't have to beat monsters with it.

"And now give me your clothes."

"But... It is made of fabric."

Maylon stared at Weed in confusion. Blacksmiths could only work with armor and weapons.

"Do as he says."

Maylon trusted Pale but was still doubtful when taking off her clothes of rainbow fabric.

It was a very rare clothing made from equally rare fabric, sewn by a true master.

After taking it, Weed immediately recognized the item that he created and sold through Mapan's auction. Somehow it ended up in hands of Maylon.

Weed slowly ironed the creases and thus increased the protection

attribute, increased the rate of health recovery and cold resistance!

"Incredible!"

Maylon's eyes widened in surprise, she was speechless.

Thus Weed improved everyone's equipment and greatly increased its attack, defense, strength and other parameters, which positively affected the overall strength of the party.

But on this Weed did not stop, he put everything back in bag and took out a cooking ware.

Surka awaited this moment the most.

"I'll make you steak this time."

"Wow!"

Although they have recently eaten, Surka reacted as if she has starved for weeks. She liked to taste new delicious food, but with no less interest she watched Weed cook.

The whole process of Weed's cooking was like magic. During frying fires were rising up high, as if to spoil the meat. But Weed closely followed the process, and gradually the smell of perfectly roasted steak began to spread around.

That smell, gave the party members a big appetite.

In fact, this was the main reason Pale and others were so eager to hunt with Weed.

'Looks delicious...'

'It's beautiful.'

Irene's and Romuna's eye got clouded. They were dreaming of how great it will taste.

'Wow! What a great smell..'

"Yes, the smell alone is 100 times more delicious than barley bread."

"Can we have some too?"

Five Geomchi's swallowed loudly.

"Eat first."

"We already ate Weed's meals many times."

Kind girls skipped their turn. Weed would still make more, so it was no harm letting Geomchis be first. The girls didn't know how wrong they were...

"These steak are so small."

"Yummy! So that's what the taste of the elite cuisine is."

Geomchi's ate meat as if to make up for all that time they had to eat the hateful barley bread.

First Weed wanted to prepare everything as it should be and put on one dish, but Geomchis were eating so fast that he had to barbecue whole slabs of meat.

"More! Faster!"

"It's ok, if the meat is a little raw, so come on."

The Geomchi3 was willing even to eat undercooked meat. That was true poverty. Be that as it may, all the meat cooked by Weed, ended up in the stomachs of Geomchis.

However, this did not stop them...

Having a feeling that something was missing, teacher smacked his lips a few times.

"Weed!"

"Yes?"

"You're great cook."

"Well, that's nothing to be particularly proud of. But if you get hungry, I'll cook something any time."

Geomchi nodded at his words, cleared his throat and said:

"Hmm, hmm! That was enough meat. But... After such a delicious meal,

my throat gets especially dry."

"Before leaving Serabourg I took some water. Do you want it?"

Weed searched his bag and took out a bottle of water, but when he was going to hand it the Master shook his head.

"I didn't mean it that way..."

"What then?.. Was you talking about alcohol by any chance?" Weed asked after realizing what the teacher meant and he nodding his head in agreement.

"Well, not necessary... But do you have some?"

"Oh, you should have said so earlier."

Deep in Weed bags lay a supply of alcohol beverages. Mainly results of his experiments of making herb mixtures. Once his cooking has moved to a Advanced level he acquired the skill of making liquors, and Weed was trying to develop it as high as possible. Whenever he got suitable herbs or vines for preparing alcohol, he was buying everything he could and brew the beverages.

Food wasn't all about dishes. With a suitable accompanying drinks the effects of the food increased! In addition, alcohol not only increases the effects of food, but also raises strength and stamina attributes.

Unfortunately, unlike food, alcohol had to prepared in advance, since the process takes much longer.

Because of that Weed dragged a bag of stock bottles with herbal liqueurs and wine.

"Good. Here, have this tincture and some snack..."

Weed quickly reached into his backpack and pulled out one of the bottles, and as a snack he got some pre-cooked slices of dried fish.

"Thank you, my student."

Geomchi, who did not expect that there will even be a snack, gladly opened a bottle and started to drink.

Looking at that, Geomchi2 also approached Weed.

"Khm-khm. To be honest, I also have a dry throat."

"Yes. I was just about to get a bottle for you too."

Weed quickly got another bottle and handed it to Geomchi2. And then, not waiting for a word from the rest of the Geomchis, he treated them as well. Since he already started giving out drinks for free, he should do so to the end with a smile.

In fact Weed anyway was going to treat all of them to one of the prepared tinctures before the fight. He wanted to see the Geomchis' profession in action and for this it was necessary to maximize their attributes, so they would show their highest performance in the battle.

'And the better they will fight, the easier the hunt will go. For rapid experience gain the performance of every party member was important.'

Weed handed glasses to Pale and his friends too.

"What, we can really drink it?"

"Of course. If you drink, your strength and health will rise a little."

The friends took a sip and saw their attributes improve.

Maylon was in a panic.

'How?.. What is... What kind of party is this?'

Due to her profession of a reporter Maylon was able to hunt with a lot of different people. Even with very well-known high-level players, or influential members of guilds. So she had a more than enough experience when it came to hunting.

But this group was denying everything she thought to be basic rules!

In this party a simple craftsman, a sculptor, was responsible for improving the characteristics of it's members! And everyone considered this to be normal! Though usually, only bards, priests, and shamans were responsible for it.

It was a really unusual party combination. Maylon drank the hard liquor

and observed carefully.

"Weed..."

"Yes?"

"Got anything else to drink? Let's try different drinks."

"It's..."

First Weed was about to refuse. He has put so much effort into making these tinctures, it could be said, that they were his treasures.

But the master said it with such a pleading voice ...

"A little bit, just a sip..."

If he asked directly, it would be easier to say no. But the teacher was sitting with such a pained expression on his face that it was impossible to refuse.

Then the second, third and other Geomchi's tried to dissuade their master.

"Master, you shouldn't do that."

"I'm sure Weed worked hard to make these tinctures."

"Well, I'm just going to taste it..."

"And our level is low as well. We should be grateful that we accepted in the party at all."

Although they pretended to stop their Master, their words clearly had no intention of doing so, because they also wanted more of Weed's beverages.

"Try these."

In front of the Master appeared a pile of bottles with something transparent, black, purple... One of them even had a snake inside, and it was the first Weed opened.

"Oh! This is Snake Soju3!"

Geomchis seized the bottle and started to drink.

"Endurance raised some more!"

"When you drink it, it gives you more energy!"

"Best tincture I've ever tried!"

Whenever the amount of snake soju decreases, Weed became more upset. Meanwhile, the Geomchis continued to drink it at a ridiculous pace. Weed had used money to purchase and make the soju, and was frustrated from losing money. Moreover, they could not afford not to be aware of their surroundings.

'Come on, the materials used cost just a few bucks ...'

Most of the ingredients he obtained in person. Like the snake he caught. And the ones he bought actually costed little. The bottle costed the most, Weed bought it for 1 silver, but it's not like it was going to disappear.

And what was there for him to worry about. As it is stated in a proverb: 'The rich are well in the hell as well.' Over the past few weeks Weed earned a huge amount of money, more than 70 thousand gold. When Weed was walking, coins in his bag were jingling loudly.

Most of the money he earned on the construction of the tomb. That is how things usually are in construction business. Huge sums to build and endless subcontracts! And the saving of money by using cheap materials!

Once in the past when Weed was still a minor, he had illegally worked in construction and remembered the words of his older companions. Now it was time to use them!

Weed was given 100,000 gold for the construction of the tomb. And he was able to save 60,000 for himself!

'Unused knowledge - Is dead knowledge.'

Weed smiled with satisfaction.

Meanwhile, Geomchis had completely forgot about their promises, and grabbed new bottles of liquor.

"Oh, this is good!"

"Master, try this one too. It's delicious."

"You're right, it's addictive"

No one tried to stop the Geomchis. If in real life they looked like formidable fighters, and in the game, their bodies became deadly weapons. All of them had sharp eyes and heavy gazes, that were completely overwhelmed Pale and others.

Friends knew that the Geomchis should be stopped, but could not think of a way to do so.

"Hic... So good!"

"Master, you look better today. Oh, and why did you become the two of you? You split?"

"Look who's talking, whelp. There are four of you!"

"A-ha-ha-ha!"

They laughed loudly, and then started to force Pale to drink too.

"Come on. Real men should be able to drink a glass."

"I already drank one."

"Then, I meant two glasses! Here am I, there is the tincture, isn't the world wonderful?"

Pale tried to refuse, but could not resist the will of the Geomchis, and had to drink. In fact, he wanted to drink. Weed's tinctures were very sweet and tasty.

After Pale the girls' turn came.

"So, let's all drink together. Cheers!"

"Oh. Thank you. You guys seem more sociable."

"Ah-ha! Of course, drinking buddies always become good friends."

Everyone continued to drink together.

"Your name is Romuna? Oh, you're so outgoing and beautiful."

"Maylon, why are you so pale?"

"Oh! Thank you, and could you pour some of that?"

One glass became two, two glasses - three. It escalated quickly. Everyone's faces were red and constant laughter was heard.

Weed emerged from his thoughts and started to worry. Not long ago, he went through serious hardships in the province of Morata, and the behaviors of his companions looked strange.

'Wait a minute ... No, no, no!'

The worst thing possible had happened. His friends were still drinking when a message appeared in front of Weed:

Subordinate players in your party drank too much and are now dead drunk.

- Their health reduced by 70%.
- Strength and Agility reduced by half.

Players can not use skills, that involving wisdom, intelligence and mana.

While alcohol does wear off, they will experience dizziness and hallucinations.

List of drunken players:

- Geomchi
- Geomchi2
- Geomchi3
- Geomchi4
- Geomchi5
- Pale
- Surka
- Romuna
- Irene
- Maylon

They went into the gorge of Huntresses just for hunting, and now his friends got drunk and were fooling around.

"Oh, look, stars!"

"How mysterious..."

"Ha-ha-ha! It's great that we got out to this gorge and had a good drink. This is the life!"

Geomchi, Pale and all others have decided to lie down on the ground under the scorching sun.

Weed froze in shock at the sight. He wanted so much to see the real masters in fight, to see their skills and techniques. Looks like it will remain only a dream.

And to worsen it, at that moment Huntresses appeared.

"Intruders? This is our territory! You won't come out alive!"

Weed sighed hopelessly and cried out:

"I summon the Death Knight!"

Out of black fog appeared the one on whom he could always rely.

"You called, master?"

"Attacks Huntresses. This will be a fun hunt."

"Understood, master! But I want to tell you one thing..."

"What now?!"

"We have been fighting shoulder to shoulder for a long time. Because of the strength of our friendship, I was able to break free from the shackles of the spell and remembered my previous life. I, knight Van Hawk from Kalamor Kingdom, acknowledges you as my master. From now on you can summon me without the necklace, I will always answer the call."

A red necklace of life created by Barr Khan. Even without wearing the necklace, I can call forth the Death Knight. The red necklace of life transformed into a radiant white light.

"Wait a minute. So, I can now remove the necklace of life? And what about my experience points?"

If the Death Knight was not lying, then the necklace that was not giving any additional bonuses or effects could now be safely removed.

In fact, for Weed there was no difference in wearing a necklace or not. Like rings, necklaces in the game were very valuable items, and to get one of them with good effect was like trying to get a star from the sky.

Best necklaces were sold for enormous money, so until Weed gets something valuable himself, the dream of good jewelry will remain a dream.

At the moment Weed was annoyed that he had constantly shared his experience points with the Death Knight. Twenty percent of the

experience he gained was taken by Van Hawk!

"You can call me without the necklace. I recognize you as my master."

In this difficult situation a sigh of relief sounded. Shared experience is gone! Weed had become truly free!

Death Knight looked calmly at approaching Huntresses.

"I should kill them?"

"Yes, attack."

At Weed's order, Death Knight began to use his skills:

"Deadly blade!"

The threads of dark energy burst from the sword and stabbed in the approaching Huntresses. However, they were high-level monsters and weren't dying from a single attack of the Death Knight.

Along with Van Hawk, Weed started acting.

"Holy blessing!"

A blinding white light emerged from Agatha sword and covered Weed. This spell could only be used five times a day, but it greatly increased protection!

"Sculpting blade!"

Weed dashed to a group of Huntresses, wounded by Death Knight's spell.

"Silly boy!"

"We, the women warriors, will show your true power!"

Whips in Huntresses hands' started to move like snakes and shot forward to attack.

Weed gathered all his strength and rushed straight ahead.

Pa-ra-ra-rak!

Unfortunately, the Huntresses' weapons got him first. One of the whips coiled around his sword, and Weed struggled to free his weapon while

avoiding attacks from other enemies. He spun and dodged to the point where it seemed like he was using magic.

Finally he managed to free his sword, close in on one of Huntresses and landed a strike.

Critical Hit!

From this moment Weed no longer distanced himself from the Huntresses. Whips were only dangerous at a distance, and if he stayed close, they were quite useless.

Agatha sword on his right hand and Zahab's knife on his left, were constantly attacking the Huntresses. However, the level of his opponents was so high that they were dying only after a serial of accurate hits.

However, Weed did not despair. To survive and find the weak spot of the enemy that was his method of fighting! If an ordinary player of Weed's level met with such a strong monster, they would most likely die, because only those with vast experiences and a perfect body control like Weed, helped not to get trapped by the Huntresses' whips.

At this point, Death Knight defeated his opponent.

"Ugh! Good, you were able defeat her. Nice job, Van Hawk!"

"No, master. I like fighting," Death Knight replied out of context.

Not so long ago, in a cave of Basra he became too proud, for which he was repeatedly beaten, so he had to become smarter to get along with the Weed's character.

Together, they killed two more Huntresses. Just as Weed was about to pick up the items that had dropped, as more enemies arrived.

Pale was not lying. You would not be able to leave the Gorge until you defeat all the enemies. In the past, the battle were not easy, but as long as friends will not come to their senses, he will have to fight with all the constantly incoming Huntresses.

Shoulder to shoulder with death knights, two warriors against hundreds of warriors.

'Half an hour, half an hour to survive, and they need to wake up...'

After the first fight van hawk health fell by a quarter, and this had to be resolved.

"Van, from now on fight them one at a time! I'll deal with the rest."

"Understood, Master."

Weed handed the Death Knight some liquor and then rushed into battle.

Death Knight took over one Huntress, Weed took on the others. To avoid their whips, he had to constantly take Huntresses and the Death Knight's position into account.

Sometimes he deliberately took Huntresses' blows, realizing, that they will not lead to tragic consequences. A dangerous game with death where he could only rely on his own strength.

The fight went on.

Weed was stabbing with a sword, cutting with a knife, trying to get hurt as little as possible and use less mana. But no matter how hard he was dodging, Huntresses constantly, bit by bit, were diminishing his health.

The moment came when his life bar dropped below 100 points. At that moment Weed jumped behind the Death Knight, and started to apply a lot of bandages as fast as possible.

And though he was in hurry as never before, by the time he finished, Death Knight's health was also at a critical point. Weed had to quickly engage in battle to distract opponents from the heavily breathing Van Hawk.

The fight still continued.

Huntresses kept arriving. After every defeated group, came a new one consisting of 3-4 aggressive Huntresses. And to make matters worse, Weed began to get tired.

Even a player like Weed who had an enormous amount of health and stamina; accumulated with help of created sculptures and many missed strikes of enemies, could not fight without break. The sword in his hand

was becoming heavier and his legs slowed down. Death was closer than ever.

He had to do something.

But at that point Weed and the Death Knight had spent all their mana. There was only one thing he could do that could save them in the current situation...

'I really do not want to get to use it...'

Weed jumped and pulled spice jars from his pockets.

One of the secrets of true chefs!

"Salt on wounds! Sauces in your eyes! Pepper and garlic juice!"

Weed was ruthlessly filling wounds of nearby enemies with culinary spices. For light wounds—Salt! For deep wounds—Soy Sauce! For eyes and nose—Hot Spices!

"Ahhh!"

"No, no... Please, not the salt."

"Ahhh! I have pepper in my eyes!"

Huntresses squealed loudly from terrible pains. Their health rapidly declined, as salt got into wounds. The pain was so intense that it was difficult to describe in words.

Secret technique of vile cook Weed! He had never used it before, as it required to spend valuable ingredients, but it allowed to break opponent's concentration and significantly lower their health by causing enormous pain.

Salt, salt, black pepper! Red peppers, pickled garlic!

Weed incessantly bombed surrounding Huntresses.

'I won't die here. I have no right to...'

Weed was not afraid to miss a day of playtime because of the death. No, he did not want to lose the skills he worked so hard to obtain. Even if all the mid-level skills will decrease by 5%, it will be a much greater loss than

the loss of a couple of levels.

Weed gathered all the strength he had left.

He was running around, luring enemies and throw valuable spices at them. There was nothing else he could do. Weed used all he could. He had even used up the allowed five holy blessings of the sword of Agatha during the fight!

One way or another, everything will be decided in the next few minutes.

While Weed was close to death, jumping and spinning like crazy, in attempt to try and avoid attacks of angered Huntresses, Master and all the others came to their senses and slightly open eyes, fascinated by the ongoing battle.

"His fighting skills is superb."

"That's Weed for you. Whatever you throw at him, he won't die easy."

"Tenacious like a cockroach."

"If all were so, the profession of the priest in the game would become redundant."

Pale, Surka, Irene and Romuna looked at Weed with envy. How could they learn to fight exceptionally!

It didn't require a lot of intelligence to properly use skills, techniques, and spells. But to fight like Weed, relying only on simple strikes and body control, was really difficult. Even more so, considering that in such battles, stamina decreases rapidly and it became very difficult to hit. And it was useless to try to fight at such pace, without rest, with constant arrival of new enemies.

Maylon also opened her eyes.

'That's some amazing sculptor!'

If all other were lying and being jealous, she could not even move from shock. What kind of sculptor can fight so well?

Her astonishment began since the moment Weed called the Death

Knight. She knew that he was not a wizard, then he must have somehow managed to obtain an incredibly valuable item in game. He also was fighting a spectacular battle and used a lot of different techniques, which she as a reporter, had never heard about!

All in all, there were a lot of things to be surprised about.

"Good."

"And he really absorbed your teachings, Master."

Geomchi and Geomchi2 calmly watched Weed's every move. It was the first time they had seen him in a real fight.

"A little different from one in the real life, but still his reaction was more than excellent."

"However, a swordsman, not only responds to the environment, but also adjusts to any situation and imposes in their battles."

"Hyun perfectly knows it all. Without a basic understanding, this level can not be achieved. Although he still has unnecessary movement, the fight as a whole is going well. Several years of training, and it would be difficult to imagine someone stronger than him."

In fact, the Geomchi's have long since regained consciousness.

Excellent warriors that got intentionally drunk... All this was planned by the Master. He wanted to know how Weed fights in Royal Road. To see him in a real sword fight. To keep things fair.

Ahn Hyundo was satisfied.

If Hyun refused to fight or panicked, he would have been very disappointing. If you follow the way of the sword then you have to go forward, despite any obstacles.

Royal Road is just a virtual reality game, but even so, inner qualities of players were important. Reliance only in battle skills, without courage, bravery and perseverance, it would be impossible to achieve high results even with weapons in game.

Some people, seeing the last attempts of Weed to survive in the difficult

battle, could not hold back any longer. Geomchi3, Geomchi4, Geomchi5, all jumped up and rushed to aid Weed.

All the others have started to get up.

"Fireball!"

"Deadly Shot!"

"Deadly Shot!"

Romuna start casting spells, and Pale and Maylon almost simultaneously shot arrows at the Huntresses.

"Holy Spirit! Use your power to save those who are hurt! Recovery! Let there be enhancement in your body. Blessed hand!"

Irene restored Weed's health, and cast empowering spells on everyone.

And so the real hunt began.

During the time the four friends have not seen Weed, they have changed. They were not those poor newcomers anymore who ran away in a panic from a simple wolf.

Harmonious attacks greeted each new group of Huntresses. It started with arrows from Maylon and Pale, then fire magic spells from Romuna!

After these attacks, Surka engaged in battle with her fist. What Geomchis did was obvious without any words. And all of that under the tireless support of Sacred Magic from Irene.

"More incoming!"

"Wow, experience grows so fast!"

The mighty Attacks of Geomchis! Harmonious actions of Pale, Irene, Romuna, Surka and Maylon! And Weed with the Death knight!

Was there anything that could stop them?

Note:

[1] The Lost - Geomchis were directionally challenged.

[2] Kimchijeon - A variety of Korean pancake-like dish that is made of

kimchi.

[3] Snake Soju - Made by placing a snake in a jar of distilled liquor (Soju) and aging it.

Chapter 4: Grades

Lee Hayan finished school and was walking home.

If she were to take a bus, she'd be home long ago. But she'd have to pay for it. Her thrift was almost as strong as that of her brother.

She only was taking bus if she was in real hurry. And even then she was pretending to be a middle school student. For middle school students ticket costed 200 won less than for high school students.

Sometimes though drivers were asking her:

“Schoolgirl...”

“Yes?”

“It's Dein high school uniform you're wearing, isn't it?”

“I'm wearing older sister's uniform.”

“Sister's uniform? Why?”

“To meet with my boyfriend from high school. Uncle, i really don't have time let's go already. Ok?”

While saying it Lee Hayan was usually bending her knees a little to seem shorter and make cute dimples on her cheeks. She was even flashing her eyes.

That was working because she looked younger than she was.

“Hmm, if so you can have a seat”

“Thank you, mister driver.”

After that drivers weren't asking any more questions and she was taking her seat with a smile.

‘Being a girl has many advantages.’

However girls also heeded a lot of things men didn't. Like underwear and cosmetics.

Lee Hayan was a natural talent in those matters. She was getting all

those things gifted by boys. She was giving them advices on how to behave with girls or introducing them to cute friends of hers and was getting presents in return.

Thanks to that Lee Hayan was able to save her allowance and put it on a personal bank account. She wasn't Lee Hyung's sister for nothing.

“It should be arriving today.”

She hurried home and checked the mailbox. The GED report card that she's been waiting for several days now finally arrived. In it were results of Hyung's exam.

“It's finally here.”

She could have probably checked results over the internet, but she looked at the report car nevertheless.

Korean: 75
Social science: 90
Math: 65
Science: 55
English: 65
Ethics: 40
Total: 390 Average: 65

Total above 360 and none below 40 meant success.

“Now brother graduated from high school.”

Lee Hayan was wiping off her tears and smiling. The hard feeling she had all this time disappeared. Every time she was going to school she was sorry for Lee Hyun. She knew how he was earning money. Many times she was almost crying when eating food, earned and cooked by her brother.

She folded the letter and entered the house.

Grandmother's condition improved, but she hasn't yet recovered, so she was still in hospital. So Hayan and her brother lived alone.

Hyun was still in the capsule. That was because today she came back earlier than usual.

“Well, I guess i'll clean up the house.”

Hayan Cleanly swept the house, cleaned the dust and washed the dishes.

“The plates from the breakfast are still here. Come to think of it, brother started to go to the dojo and return tired again, like at that time.”

The time when Lee Hyun was preparing for Royal Road!

For almost a year her brother lived like he was possessed. He found and studied all the works on virtual reality and collected as much information on Royal Road as he could. At the same time he trained his body and learned to fight.

24 hours a day was literally not enough for him.

Her brother slept about 3-4 hours a day, yet still found time to prepare meals for the family.

When he first started to go to the dojo she was terribly upset. His hands were covered by blisters and body bruised. He was coming back exhausted and falling asleep right away like he was dead.

Those memories alone were making Lee Hayan depressed.

At such moments Hayan was trying to distract herself with work.

‘Now I’ve got to study.’

To get accepted to ‘Korea’ university.

That was her most important goal right now.

At first she didn’t want to go to that university. After all it was not a matter of studying in the most prestigious university but of getting all the necessary knowledge. At least that was the case for Interior designer, which was her desired profession.

But Lee Hyun wanted her to study in ‘Korea’ university. And for her brother, who sacrificed so much for her, she should at least be able to study hard. Her goal was to get a full 4-year scholarship!

But that wasn’t her only aim. After graduating from school and getting the scholarship, she was planning to start earning money as a private tutor.

*

“Granny, brother’s report card arrived!”

That day Hayan couldn’t hold her joy and ran to the hospital to give grandmother the news.

“Really? So did he pass?”

Grandmother’s face was tired but cheerful.

“Yeah! He did! Look at his grades. Apart from Ethics all the grades are high.”

“That’s fine. What’s important is he’s got a smart head.”

Although some could interpret it as ‘His head is smart, but as a human he is a failure’. But Hyun’s family knew well what he had to go through in last 10 years, so they never doubted his human qualities for a moment.

Grandmother was still looking at his grades.

“He really did it. Before I died...”

“Huh? What’re you talking about, granny? Our happy life has just started.”

Lee Hayan reassuringly took her grandmother’s hand.

*

Every morning Lee Hyun was going to the dojo.

To exercise his body and to learn fencing from Ahn Hyundo were his two main morning activities.

“Come in.”

“Congratulations on passing the exam!”

When Lee Hyun entered the dojo Ahn Hyundo, instructors and almost all the students were waiting for him. They were ready to celebrate Hyun’s graduation from high school.

“So he’s got a high school diploma now, eh?”

“I used to studied hard in high school too, but...”

Ahn Hyundo got surprised by instructors' envy.

"What's with you lot? Didn't you go to highschool too?"

"No, we left it early to train with sword more."

Instructors lived only to train with swords.

Ahn Hyundo nodded.

"So that's why you're so simple."

"That's..."

They greatly respected their teacher but his last words hurt them.

'At least we finished middle school.'

'You didn't even go to elementary school yourself...'

However Ahn Hyundo had a doctor's degree. World's leading universities granted him an honorary doctor's degree in recognition of his kendo skills. But actually he only ever went to the kindergarten!

There the child Ahn Hyundo have beaten many of other kindergarteners, for what he has been punished often.

'On the day he got accepted to elementary school he has beaten up neighbourhood bullies with a wooden sword...'

'They spent 16 weeks in a hospital I think? And the 7-year-old who beat them was taken into custody.'

'So he never got to enter the elementary school...'

Instructors knew about it, but kept silent.

Ahn Hyundo was following the path of a sword since childhood. Days were passing by but no worthy opponents appeared, so he had to spend time meditating or playing Go, However even without any opponent Master was constantly improving his mind and body in numerous daily trainings.

Royal Road was taking Ahn Hyundo back to his childhood. He was able to fight with strong opponents, high level monsters. The long forgotten

feeling of being alive, constantly improving, returned to him.

It seemed like his childhood dream had finally started to come true...

“Ahem... Master...”

With a little hesitation Lee Hyun asked:

“My sister came to watch our training today. Do you mind?”

“So it is? Of course, she’s welcome...”

Ahn Hyundo gave his permission without a second thought. Most of the apprentices were professional swordsmen. Of course bringing in talented people from various places was encouraged as well. But general public or young kendo students sometimes trained in dojo too.

“Okay now, let’s start the training. Line up!”

After a short celebration all the students and instructors, including Chung Il Hoon took their places.

“Today we’ll start from an hour of basic training and then spar.”

“Yes!”

The usual morning routine. Students brandished their swords with swift and accurate movements.

“Then I’ll go get my sister, Master.”

“Okay.”

Lee Hyun left the dojo and headed towards school gates. They didn’t have cellphones, so they just made an appointment at a certain time.

“Brother!”

As it was Sunday and Hyun didn’t have any lessons, she was waiting at the school gates, dressed in casual clothes. Her skirt was barely covering her knees and short hair were swaying with the wind.

Her friends came with her.

“Hello everyone.”

“Hey. You did a good job at the festival.”

Those were Hayan's friends!

Lee Hyun replied with a shrug:

"Eh... Yeah."

"Well then, let's go. Come on, brother."

Hyun nodded in agreement and led them to the dojo. The moment doors closed behind them, all the students inside reacted vigorously.

"Oh, girls!"

"Schoolgirls!"

"Wow, high school girls came to a place like this..."

"They're pretty."

The unexpected happened, girls came to the men's den. All the trainees suddenly started working harder. The strength and speed of their strikes raised significantly.

*

Today the training was really hard.

Lee Hyun left the dojo and, as he didn't want to spend money on a bus, he decided to run all the way home. Running was another good way of maintaining good physical condition.

'I graduated from high school...'

Hyun was running with a smile on his face. Maybe he didn't get to go to high school all the way through, but now he would be able to proudly say that he graduated it.

'Granny will be very happy. And Hayan...'

Since their parents died Lee Hyun was worried most about his sister. When she was a child she was unusually timid and scaredy. Their complicated family circumstances forced her to grow tougher.

"I wouldn't be able to continue replacing her parents forever. Probably a few more years..."

The biggest dream of Lee Hyun was for his sister to meet a decent man and marry him!

On the wedding ceremony he'd take the place of her father and be the one to bring the bride to the groom. Since early childhood he was familiar with the role of a parent and was used to taking care of his little sister. And when the moment comes when the groom will take the bride's hand Lee Hyun will become free.

He never actually thought of what will happen afterwards. Every day he had to struggle through many hardships to try and earn even a little money. He didn't have time to think about such distant future.

So only when his sister will finish the university and marry will he be able to relax and start living for himself.

'However...'

Lee Hyun laughed bitterly.

Hyun must meet a really good guy.

With her current grades she would be able to easily get into 'Korea' university and get a good job after graduating from it. That, coupled with her good looks, would make it possible for his sister to come together with the best men.

But if on her wedding she will be led by her brother, who barely graduated from high school, that might embarrass her.

'I'm so ashamed I'm uneducated...'

Lee Hyun started to worry that his poor education might become a disadvantage for his sister and interfere with her life.

Then he saw Great Society Rehabilitation Center!

He was just passing it on the way home. In addition to its stately appearance it was filled with state-of-the-art equipment.

'I had been diagnosed there once. And if I manage to become a doctor there my sister would be proud.'

Last few days weren't so easy for Dr. Cha Eunhee.

She used hundreds of various treatments, trying to return Jeong Seoyoon to normal state. And Royal Road was her last resort.

Virtual reality games are known to grant emotional stability. They relieve stress by allowing to satisfy unfulfilled in reality desires. Traveling between reality and virtuality helps to fade the painful feelings.

Cha Eunhee hoped that it will help to save Seoyoon from her mental obsession.

Every day since Seoyoon started playing, Cha Eunhee was watching her playing records to be able to examine her psychological state better, than any test could show, as in the game Seoyoon had to constantly make decisions by herself and interact with the environment.

All the Seoyoon's actions in Royal Road were recorded in the capsule. That was private information, but as Seoyoon's doctor Cha Eunhee had access to it.

First recordings of Seoyoon's hunt were encouraging.

"This way she'll recover in no time!"

The initial tendency was positive.

Even though she never laughed or talked to anybody and was very withdrawn overall. She started to hunt and the desire to hunt was a display of greed.

Cha Eunhee thought that her desire to become stronger and acquire better items will make her more lively. That such 'human' behaviour would certainly make a positive impact on treatment.

But with time her expectations waned.

Seoyoon was just hunting. She was going to places where monsters gathered in large groups and fought them. Fought fiercely, to the death, like a berserker.

And she still wasn't talking to anyone in Royal Road.

'But wasn't there a positive change?'

In Seraburg got acquainted with a fighting instructor. They weren't very close, but it still was a huge breakthrough. They were eating together and she listened to him talking.

'Just a little but she's reacting...'

The monster hunt was a good sign as well. Closed people usually become secretive and suspicious. Sometimes they even start acting like a child with superiority complex. Thankfully Seoyoon's state wasn't at such level yet.

When people endure a great pain, they often start to feel sad or scared afterwards. To threat such residual state fighting was a great medicine.

"Huh, still a long way til she's completely healed."

Cha Eunhee sighed deeply.

After leaving Seraburg Jeong Seoyoon headed south where she continued her endless hunt.

'How long will you remain locked in that state?'

Jeong Seoyoon wasn't just a patient for her, but more of a little sister, as they knew each other since childhood. Their parents were friends so they were meeting often, little Seoyoon was always calling Cha Eunhee older sister and following her around.

But now she wasn't neither laughing nor speaking any more. And Cha Eunhee was doing all she could to return her to normal, cheerful self.

Some parts in the recordings were surprising her.

"Why is there a statue of Seoyoon in Baran village?"

It seemed that Seoyoon didn't notice it, but the statue of softly smiling guardian deity of the village was her splitting image!

The face of statue of Freya must have been based on Seoyoon.

The beauty of that smile was making Cha Eunhee dizzy.

*

Seoyoon was continuing to hunt and move deeper into the southern part of Rosenheim kingdom. All the more people were coming to southern part of Rosenheim kingdom, and in order to avoid them she had to move deeper little by little.

Hunting monsters such as Dark Ghouls and Blood Ravens.

However the once low, population of southern region was constantly growing. Players had yet to come to dungeons and hunting grounds used by Seoyoon, but it was already bothering her.

‘I can’t stay here any longer...’

Seoyoon decided to leave the south of the Rosenheim kingdom.

Originally she started playing at the center of the continent, slowly making her way south towards Rosenheim, however having come this far south she realized, that there are no free lands further ahead.

‘To the east... Where there’s no players...’

Seoyoon decided to go to Lands of Despair.

*

The construction of the pyramid became the hot news of Royal Road. Most of the rumors were spread by the people, directly involved in the construction.

The pyramid almost instantly appeared on the web-sites. And then several journalist teams were sent to Weed by various media sources. They wanted to record all the stages of construction, from the initial concept to the final result.

Of course the report about the pyramid could fit in a small article, but reporters wanted to spotlight the pyramid, created by player's effort alone in detail. To show players' feelings, their hard work, that made the construction of the pyramid possible. And they had to do it from the beginning to the end, from the moment the quest first appeared, as that was the way great history is written!

The pyramid, built by thousands of players' hard work!

The TV producers were already thinking about making a show, where famous actors and showmen would be building their own pyramid. They thought that audience will be interested in whether someone else will be able to complete such an impossible at first glance task.

"We'll pay you a million won."

"If you agree to work with us, we'll pay you 2 millions!"

Every day Weed received such offers, but he was refusing them. However once he got an offer, very different from others. The Korean Ministry of Education decided to launch an advertising campaign of textbooks, and wanted to involve the pyramid in it.

And they offered seven million won!

Weed accepted it.

*

The hunt in the Huntresses' gorge was getting livelier with each passing day.

Though their party didn't have the mandatory warriors or paladins, the high level of cooperation between members allowed them to quickly demolish the amazons and earn lots of experience points. During past few days Weed received 7 levels and reached a total level of 266

Fighting together with Geomchis was incredibly pleasant. He would continue hunting with them, but the construction was nearing it's end and he just had to attend to it.

The moment the last stone fell into place Weed received a message

Ding!

You completed the construction of the tomb for great king Theodarren.

Feeling the approaching death, King decided to build a marvelous tomb for himself and appointed the most famous sculptor of the continent to the task. And now the tomb is complete.

Receive your reward from king Theodarren.

But hurry to do it before his death.

"It's finished!"

"Hurray!"

Numerous players around the pyramid were shouting happily.

For the first time so many people gathered in such a backwater kingdom. Every player mined or delivered at least 1-2 stone blocks and contributed his part of sweat and effort to the construction of the tomb.

Weed headed to the royal palace.

The tomb was complete all that was left was to report to the king and receive the reward.

The king met him in the throne room like the last time. He looked even older and the progress of his illness was evident.

Following the etiquette, Weed knelt before the king.

"Your Majesty..." - he started talking, but was immediately interrupted by the king.

"Stand! Such renowned master deserves more respect than that. Besides all this etiquette makes me uncomfortable."

"No, your Majesty."

Weed wasn't intending to get up, but the king gave order to his knights and they got him on his feet anyway. Weed noticed, that king's attitude towards him significantly changed since their last encounter.

"You have my gratitude. Thanks to you, I finally have a place for my final rest. You are a great sculptor. And I am very curious at what was your thoughts, when you was building the tomb."

"I was thinking about all the hardships your majesty had to endure during your life."

"Yes... I vanquished many foes to defend my kingdom. And now, after my death I'll get to the very depth of hell where I will suffer for eternity."

"Not at all, your majesty. Your life passed like a firework. The one who's not scared by the flame and tries to catch it might get burned. But you

were burning yourself to illuminate everything around you. Your bright fire was warming and protecting Rosenheim for a long time. And now you will be able to rest in a comfortable place and watch your kingdom prosper."

The King was greatly satisfied by those words.

"I don't regret at all that I entrusted this task to a sculptor, whose name was spoken of by so many. You prepared a marvelous resting place for me, far more than I have expected of you. So go now, get your promised reward."

You succesfully completed the quest.

Fame increased by 690.

You received 2930 reputation points of Rosenheim Kingdom.

- Level up.
- Level up.
- Level up.
- Level up.
- Level up.

Five levels and 2930 reputation points with the royal family!

The King continued speaking:

"All the others, who assisted the construction of the tomb will receive their appropriate rewards. Your service to the royal family is great, we wish to reward you. What is it that you wish?"

The exciting moment, that Weed was imagining so many times has arrived.

'2930 points... I could get a rare or even unique item from royal treasury.'

The sword of Agatha was a good item in many ways. It increased the Faith attribute, increased Health recovery and even allowed to use blessing 5 times a day. But still the sword, forged by Order of Dreyra had low damage stat.

Weed wanted a sword!

The best one possible.

However he had to think about completing the quests he already had...

'Even the best sword in the world won't help me in the Lands of Despair.'

Weed made a decision and said:

"Your Majesty, I have got a task from the Order of Freya. Soon I will have to go against the necromancers, worshiping the dark god Beelzebul. The Order learned, that something evil is being prepared in Lands of Despair, and my task is to deal with it before necromancers gather too much forces. However, to my regret I don't have enough men to complete such an important task. That is why I request assistance of brave warriors of Rosenheim."

The King carefully listened to Weed and seriously shook his head.

"Lands of Despair... I heard there are refugees living there, who were chased there during the era of strife and war with dark elves. During my reign I have sent my troops twice to those hostile lands, but not a single man has returned. For that reason I ordered a high, thick wall to be erected, to prevent the evil of that place from invading my lands."

"That's how it is..."

Only now Weed started to understand, that that place was even more dangerous than the province of Mora!

But it was not the time to give up. The quest is an adventure. And until his experience proves, that this mission is impossible, nothing will stop him from trying. As it is often said, 'it's better to regret doing something, than to regret not having done it'.

While Weed was lost in thoughts, Theodarren quietly continued:

"In such a dangerous, unlawful place you'll need loyal people. I'll provide you with soldiers. But I ask you that you treat them with respect and not let them be killed in vain."

He'll have to spend reputation points on soldiers. That decision almost

made Weed cry.

‘Anyway, going there with only priests and hoping for a miracle would be a suicide. The completion of the quest is more important than any unique items...’

However even after taking that decision, he couldn't help but try to scrounge something valuable.

“I treasure my memories of Rosenheim Kingdom so much, that I wish I had some kind of memento of it. If your Majesty doesn't mind, a sword would be a perfect fit for that.”

Right words, said at the right time.

The King nodded and ordered one of his advisors to lead the sculptor to the training grounds.

On the way Weed was inventing thousands of excuses to take the best possible weapon from the armory. He recalled his hunt in the Lair of Litvarth and his quest in the province of Mora. He had to endure so much to finally get here and get an opportunity to receive something really valuable.

To come through all that suffering to spend all the points on soldiers?

Never! Weed ought to take at least somewhat valuable item for himself.

Advisor led him to the training grounds, where multiple warriors were training.

“By the King's order you are allowed to take knights and soldiers to aid you in your mission in the Lands of Despair. Pick them yourself.”

Knights of Rosenheim were dressed in shining silvery armor. Their horses were very clean and looked to be tended to well.

Please pick warriors using your reputation points.

After the window appeared, numbers started appearing on knights' chests.

‘Looks like it's their value in reputation points.’

Every available knight or soldier had a price. He had to choose carefully,

spending points only on really necessary soldiers.

First Weed carefully examined all the knights.

They were gathered in a few groups. There were Scarlet Knights, known for their strength, White Knights, known for magic and Royal Knights, who served king personally. The latter had 280th level.

Without a second thought Weed stopped his choice on them. Personal knights of the king were the best fighters of the kingdom.

‘In such dangerous lands I’ll need good support...’

Weed approached closer and saw numbers on their chests. They started at 30 and went all the way up to 100 points per person.

The reputation point system was one of the reasons the tyranny of guilds in Royal Road was reduced. With it even solo players and small parties were able to complete quests and accumulate reputation points of kingdoms and other powers of Royal Road. And in case they need help, to do a quest for example, they didn’t have to look for a guild any beg for it. They were able to hire an army from some king or aristocracy.

While walking around the training grounds, Weed reached a corner, where a great number of various armors and weapons were piled up. Swords, spears, axes, bows, clubs and maces, there were too many kinds to list them all.

Sword alone numbered more than a hundred. And of course every item had a price in reputation points above it.

Old and rusty ones were cheap, just 2-3 points. But the good ones were much more expensive, 1500-2000 points.

So if he picks a lot of soldiers, he would get a poor weapon, and if he takes a great weapon, he’ll have few soldiers. Weed faced a difficult choice.

‘I worked so hard to get these points... I just can’t spend them all on soldiers.’

If an NPC were to die in combat, he would be gone for good. But even if

none of them dies on the quest, Weed will still have to return them all back. But the weapon will stay with him even after he finishes the quest. He would even be able to sell it for cash.

After giving it a lot of thought, Weed decided to pick 10 Royal Knights. When choosing them, he was immediately giving them new names.

51, 53, 55, 56, 58, 59, 60, 98, 99, 100!

Of course Weed will remember the faces and names of knights, who he spent his hard-earned reputation points on.

“It looks like the King values you high, so I will obey.”

“I don’t like it, but I can’t go against King’s order, so I will follow you.”

Knights weren’t hiding their disapproval. Straightforward, rude and displeased statements were directed at Weed, but he ignored them and proceeded to pick the weapon and ordinary soldiers.

‘I should pick the best weapon possible and then spend the rest of the reputation points on infantry. I can’t let my points drop low enough that I wouldn’t be able to pick the sword I want.’

First he examined the decorated swords, covered by ornaments. However he didn’t like any of it.

‘Useless stuff. More of a work of art than a weapon.’

Unfortunately he wasn’t allowed to check the weapons’ stats when choosing, so he had to rely on his intuition and experience.

Good thing, that in free city Somuren he had a chance to thoroughly study weapons and learn to estimate their value by their looks. His experience as a blacksmith was helping as well.

Weed was trying to find a sword, containing the largest amount of mithril. And when he found one he picked it with a little doubt.

“Identify!”

Sword of Cold Loteu
Durability: 150/150.
Damage: 68-75

This sword belonged to Loteu from Niffleheim Kingdom, the leader of the mercenaries from the northern part of the continent. It contains the power of ice.

Requirements:

- Strength: 600.
- Level: 250.

Effects:

- Strength +50.
- Agility +10.
- Leadership +20%.
- Bonus frost damage +30.
- Every attack slows the opponent.

If you take a profession of a mercenary, you immediately get silver status.

“Not bad at all.”

Weed spent 1700 reputation point on the sword and was satisfied with it. Even though its effects were worse than those of Sword of Agatha, its damage was a lot higher. And if you take into account the sharpening bonus, this sword was easily best of what he ever had.

After taking the sword he had 541 reputation points left, that he was going to spend on hiring soldiers as well. Weed continued walking around the training grounds and to his surprise he noticed a familiar faces.

“Chief!”

Becker, Hosram, Buren and Dale. Soldiers from his raid to the Lair of Litvart. Old friends.

“You are here too?”

“Yes, the areas around capital started to get invaded by monsters and we were called back to patrol and hunt monsters.”

The four soldiers became captains long ago and were in charge of their own troops of hundred people.

“We knew you will come back someday.”

“Yeah, we are so happy to see you again, Chief!”

Buren and dale couldn't hold back their joy. During their hunt in the

Lair of Litvart they became really close to Weed and were truly happy to meet him.

Weed considered himself lucky.

In the upcoming mission he will need reliable soldiers like never before!

"I take you with me, guys. Come on, we have a lot of work to do."

After picking Buren and others together with their 400 soldiers Weed had only 3 reputation points left.

Advisor carefully examined all the picked warriors and said:

"It is desirable that you return all the knights and soldiers intact."

Weed decided not to respond. However cruel that sounds, but he was picking them to fight. There were a lot of battles with dangerous foes ahead of them, and Weed believed that losses were unavoidable.

Of course he wasn't intending to let his hard-earned soldiers die easily, but he wasn't going to keep them behind also.

However the advisor continued:

"If you keep their lives, the royal family will recognize your merits again. And if you return them stronger and more experienced, King and other aristocrats will be very pleased."

Advisor's words could be interpreted as a promise to refund all the reputation points, spent on the returned soldiers and increase them for every soldier, who raise their level in upcoming battles.

'If I knew this would happen, I would pick a lot more soldiers...'

In the very end among the soldiers Weed noticed Docke, the instructor from training hall. Not so long ago he was promoted and now he was training knights in the palace. Also there was Midvale, the knight, that Weed was accompanying to Lair of Litvart. However he didn't have enough points for either of them. Besides each of them costed more than any other knight.

'Too bad. Well, hopefully i'll have another opportunity...'

Weed finished his business at the palace and headed to the Order of Freya, accompanied by the soldiers he hired.

*

At the entrance the highest church officials were already waiting for him.

“Are you ready to depart?”

“Yes.” - abruptly replied Weed.

Behind his back were knights, Buren, Becker, Hosram, Dale and four hundred of simple soldiers. All of them were a little tense, as they didn't expect to be entrusted with such an important mission.

Even Royal Knights rarely participated in quests of such high difficulty.

High priest said:

“The promised 50 priests are already waiting at the portal.”

“We'll show you the way.”

The priests of Order of Freya. Weed greeted them and inspected carefully. There were many bearded men in robes, but much to his surprise there were a lot more priestesses. And all of them were striking beauties.

Soldiers were looking at them wide-eyed.

“Woah!”

“Now I feel more encouraged, Chief!”

From a single glance at the priestesses the fighting spirit of Becker and other soldiers shot sky high.

Weed stepped on the portal at the head of a great army. But he was only able to command 50 priests of Freya. Royal Knights, Buren, Becker and others will be independently evaluating the situation and make their own decisions.

“Freya bless you!”

High priest and others recited a prayer and the portal started to glow. When the glow disappeared, Weed and others were already far from Rosenheim.

*

Pyramid quickly became one of the most visited places of Rosenheim Kingdom. Every day more than 40 thousands people visited it.

Of course most of them were coming not to look at works of art, but to receive the buff of Sphinx statue.

“Wow! Great.”

“True. That’s crazy, to build a pyramid here...”

“I saw a movie about the construction. That was really cool, I only came here because of it.”

But to the surprise of those who came here for the first time, besides the famous Sphinx statue they found there other sculptures of gazelle, kangaroo, deer, rabbit and other low-level monsters with sad expressions on their faces.

Looking at those sculptures many players felt guilty as in the beginning they were slaughtering great numbers of those harmless herbivores.

So it was no surprise that after reading the engraved words their hands were reaching to their pockets.

- For looking at the statue pay as much as your heart tells you.
- All the collected money will be donated!
- We will use them to help those in need.

Every visitor was leaving a copper or silver coin.

Chapter 5: Village of Exiles

Like always, today Lee Hyun woke up early and proceeded to doing his usual chores.

First he visited the Dark Gamers Union website and started reading latest messages.

As Choi Junghoon said, the website had plenty of information about quests, dungeons, crafting skills or even trading routes. And of course, as it was a website for Dark Gamers, most of information was about items.

Hyun Lee had 'C' access level and was able to view corresponding entries.

“Nothing special today too.”

He was looking for any mentions of unique items! And even though Lee Hyun had just 'C' access level, sometimes he was stumbling upon some interesting bits of information. Usually those were contributed by other players with the same access level, they were telling about their adventures, secret quests and rewards for them. Such messages were quickly becoming popular and getting moved to sections he couldn't access to.

Lee Hyun was trying to catch them before that happened.

About 3-4 such messages a day appeared on the website. And if you carefully watch it, you can read them before they are moved.

However today he just wasted time again.

‘Whatever. Anyway, i'm almost out of points.’

From the account used by Lee Hyun every day a few of points were deducted. It happened every time he was reading a message. That way Dark Gamers Union was forcing members to post useful messages to earn points, used to view other information.

Hyun got up from the chair and went down to the hall. There he has put on a light jacket, took a basket and went out of house.

Every morning after exercises and browsing news on the internet he was going to the market to get some cheap food.

“Good morning.”

“Oh, young man, you’re early today. I’ve got some fresh cutlass fish today. I’ll sell it to you cheap.”

“Thanks.”

Hyun was coming to the market every day so it was natural that all the salesmen knew him very well.

‘Picky bastard!’

‘Damn that greedy guy!’

Even when buying a single fish, Hyun was very demanding. He was always asking where it was caught, checking how fresh it is, examining eyes and mouth. He was noticing every little thing, even the way the hook was removed.

Salesmen on the market were used to customers with no knowledge of fish’s freshness. However Lee Hyun was well aware of those matters and never hesitated to haggle. He knew all the prices very well and trying to sell him something for more than its price was the gravest possible mistake!

Also Hyun was never searching for cheap food. Every morning he was cooking for his little sister so he was buying only the best of the best.

That kind of ‘infamy’ [reputation?] allowed him to buy best food at reasonable prices without having to bargain.

Using the best ingredients he brought from market he made cutlass fish stew with soy sauce for his sister.

“Thanks, brother. Everything was very tasty as always. I’m off to school!”

“Okay, have a safe trip.”

Once his sister left to school it was time Hyun devoted to himself.

Lee Hayan was eagerly preparing for 'Korea' university entrance exams and was gathering all available information. She was surprised to learn from university website, that there were many ways to get accepted to it. But one particularly attracted her attention, the one for professional gamers.

Video games have become an important part of our life and culture, the amount of people, playing games regularly constantly increases.

After virtual reality came to our lives and the revolutionary Royal Road appeared our university opened a faculty, devoted to video games. There we study entire history of video game industry, from the very beginning to virtual reality.

Conditions to apply:

- Records on awards, related to videogames.
- School diploma.

After provided information is checked, you will be interviewed by one of the future professors, that will check the applicant's knowledge and make the final decision.

Virtual reality was giving people chance to live their dream.

There were no people with disabilities and everyone was able to enjoy their adventures to the fullest.

After the release of Royal Road the number of travel agencies and consequently number of corresponding faculties of tourism and transportation decreased. But in their place faculties associated with videogames appeared.

Lee Hayan knew what exactly helped their family out of poverty. Money for selling her brother's game character.

"Hyun doesn't have any awards, but he has records about the sale of his character, maybe that will do?"

Though the sale records weren't some kind of gaming award, they still signified an achievement and could serve as a good argument.

Especially since Hyun had great understanding of the subject. During his year of getting ready for Royal Road Hyun studied all the available works on virtual reality.

He probably knew more about virtual reality than any student of gaming

faculty.

“It might work.”

Lee Hayan used her savings to buy official application papers and filled them herself on behalf of Lee Hyun!

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Plains of Despair.

On the custom map, made by players a vast blank patch was located to the east of Rosenheim Kingdom and British Confederacy.

There wasn't much trustworthy information about this region. The few brave souls who dared to go deep into this territory were dying in a couple days under constant attacks from monsters!

On the maps sold at merchant stores only one thing was said about it: ‘If you're looking for true despair, these lands are for you.’

A very precise and complete description for such a dangerous place.

Weed and following him NPC appeared in a spacious cave, hidden inside one of the hills. The entrance was cleverly disguised by a large stone so that it was impossible to find it without knowing the precise location.

“Awwwoooooooooo!”

The moment Weed appeared he was greeted by horrifying wolf howl.

‘Scarry...’

After arriving at the unknown territory it is always important to be cautious. Even NPC knew it. But Buren and Becker seemed to ignore that simple rule.

“If the Chief is with us we don't have to worry about anything!”

“We trust you, Chief!”

“Let's go see how you all those monsters down with one swing of the sword!”

“ ... ”

Weed sighed and gave soldiers an order:

“Stay here. Make arrangements for food, rest and guard. Wait for my return.”

“Yes! We understand.”

Luckily for Weed the area around the portal was safe. Having all the initial steps planned in advance, he bought a month's worth of provisions for his small army.

Weed watched his people set a camp for a bit and then slowly left the hideout to scout the surroundings.

There was strong piercing wind outside.

After nearly tumbling down a few times Weed climbed to the top of the hill to get a good view.

All around were wide grasslands, swaying in the wind.

Plains of Despair was such an unfitting name for this entrancing landscape of rolling green waves.

“Beautiful...”

The grasses was moving in unison as if performing some glorious dance.

Weed took a look around.

To the east of the hill was a mountain range. Not so high or steep, but very long.

“I believe they were called Yuroki mountains on the map?”

The map of Bersa continent by an unknown author. According to it Plains of Despair had only one mountain range - Yuroki mountains.

The place, inhabited by numerous giant monsters!

On top of the mountain range Weed noticed a high stone wall and a fort. And at the center of the fort a strange black temple was visible.

‘This is it...’

It was hard to say for sure at such a great distance, but it seemed that

there was a Beelzebub statue there. That must have been the temple of dark god, erected by necromancers of Bar Khan Demoff.

“Chwi-i-ik!”

A weird sound suddenly came from somewhere. Weed immediately fell to the ground and tried to be as unnoticeable as possible.

In the distance an ork dressed in steel armor with a glaive in his hands appeared. Weed’s mood improved after seeing him.

“Well, at least something. Maybe i’ll be able to raise the level of my soldiers by hunting orcs before storming the temple of the dark god. Some work and the mission will be finished in no time.”

His chest started filling with hope and confidence.

“I will never retreat. Will fear no opponent. Even orcs are welcome.”

About the time Weed reached level 200 he caught a stranded treasure-hungry orc. He was looking like a man, a big, green, ugly man with fangs.

“Nice meeting you, old friend.” - sung Weed and slowly headed towards his target.

The wave of confidence was pushing him to quickly kill his first monster in this land to mark the start of the big hunt and eventual assault on the dark temple!

Rustle!

The trees and bushes at the foot of the mountains started shaking.

Weed, who was about to attack, froze in place.

The Yuroki mountains were moving!

A huge army of orcs was moving between the trees!

Before his eyes a horde of more than 3 thousands orcs was marching.

And he didn’t even know if it was an entire army. And maybe he would never know.

[t/n: this piece looks tricky in korean, 2 long 23-character sentences

different in just 1 character.]

“ ... ”

Weed sheathed the sword and held his breath.

‘At least vampires didn’t have such great numbers. There’s just way too many orcs.’

Moreover, the orc horde was just scaring away other, even more fearsome monsters.

In the end Weed had to hug the ground and wait for orcs to pass. Only when the rumbling of the horde disappeared into the distance he dared to lift his head.

As he already had inspected Yuroki mountains, this time Weed looked to the west. There was a great view at the surrounding area from the hill and he managed to see something interesting. A wall. And some frontier human settlement behind it!

Weed made sure there were no monsters around and headed towards the settlement.

You were first to discover the Village of Exiles.

Rewards:

- Fame increased by 300.
- For a week the rewards and experience for the village’s quests are doubled.

When Weed approached the gates an almost forgotten message appeared before him. That was the first time since the Dwarf’s Grave at Baruk mountain range.

‘That means I’m first.’

No player yet managed to come so far into the Plains of Despair. There were many players who were disregarding their lives to explore new territories, but Plains of Despair were just too vast, so this part remained undiscovered.

Exiles from all over the Bersa continent lived here. Almost all of them were big tough guys with numerous scars all over their bodies.

If Weed didn't know their origin beforehand he'd have guessed that they were barbarians.

Behind villages walls to his surprise he found around 300 hastily-built wooden houses.

"There's an outsider."

"See him for the first time."

All the villagers were avoiding unfamiliar stranger. But that didn't stop Weed in the least.

"Hello everyone."

"It seems you know nothing about our village, stranger. We live in a very dangerous place, we can't waste time on idle talks, especially with outsiders like you."

"Nice to meet you."

"I don't trust outsiders."

Weed tried to start a conversation again and again, but villagers were just leaving while ignoring him or even showing hostility.

“We didn’t forget who banished our ancestors. What did you come here for?”

No one in the village accepted him.

‘Probably this village is completely separated from the rest of the continent and my fame means nothing for them.’

However Weed wouldn’t be himself if he gave up easily.

He decided to take his usual approach: he’s set a campfire in the middle of the village and started to roast a boar that he prepared in advance.

“Come check the meat out, it’s so good you won’t be able to stop. It’s completely free, so eat as much as you want! Also I can carve a beautiful sculpture of any animal for you.”

Weed was aiming at one of the basic instincts - hunger! Who could ignore such delicious food, especially since it was free?

But villagers were still ignoring his efforts and some even got angry.

“Are you making fun of us?”

“We can cook ourselves.”

“Even after starving for ten days a warrior won’t lose his pride. It seems outsiders don’t understand such simple thing.”

“Ahahaha, sculptures... Who even needs them?”

All the inhabitants of Village of Exiles were great warriors.

Despite all Weed’s efforts none of them approached him. The few of them who stopped nearby were just watching from a distance, talking and laughing at him.

And Weed was continuing to roast the boar despite the mockery and threatening looks.

Never before cooking and sculpture mastery failed him. Everyone who as much as tasted his food were absolutely in love with it. And sculptures often brought good results too.

Once he carved a beautiful bouquet for a player named Volk, who was going to propose to a girl he loved. Sculpture mastery was always bringing unexpected benefits.

‘They must have no sense of art... Savages.’

Villagers’ attitude did not upset Weed at all.

‘It’s not the first time I’m being ignored. I’m used to it...’

He remembered well the time he was working at a factory when he was a child.

When Hyun was 14 years old he was already working full-time undoing the seams in a stuffy and dusty room. That was hard and monotonous work and he was only allowed to leave on lunch breaks. Hyun was terribly jealous of cheerful students passing by him when he was on lunch breaks.

At the time he was an outsider for everyone. However that didn't break him but instead strengthened and made him grow up in spite of everything.

Weed finished roasting the boar, and after having receiving no response, he packed everything back into his bag and continued walking through the village trying to start a conversation. He believed that among all the NPCs there must be at least one who will talk to him.

And he wasn't wrong. One young guy, who was crouching on the ground and staring at a shield lying besides him, turned to Weed and said:

"Oh, stranger! If you managed to get here you must be worth something."

"Got where?"

"Hah, you don't even know where you are?"

"Thanks to the map I have a general idea of my location, but I know nothing about this place." - honestly replied Weed.

"Well, we don't know anything about you either. This village appeared here in the Times of Chaos. Heard anything about that?"

"Yeah, but not much."

"Those were times when everyone went mad and ran rampant. Our

ancestors came to these lands and fought for their lives. To be honest they were willing to fight, but they had no weapons. They were driven here without as much as a hilt of a sword...”

Visions of the past started to appear before Weed’s eyes.

Numerous soldiers with spears and swords were chasing poor starving people away into far lands. Lands, filled with multiple dangerous monsters. There were hundreds of thousands of people. The ground was soaked with blood, mourning and grief.

“At first the number of people, banished here, quickly reduced. Only the most tenacious survived. Ahem! I would tell you more, but I’m busy at the moment.”

“Busy? With what?”

“You might have noticed this shield here. Unfortunately it’s broken and I need a replacement as soon as possible. Could you by chance do me a favour?”

“Yes, I’ll help any way I can.”

“Great. You should bring this shield to a certain man and take a new one from him. He’s running a large blacksmith in this village.”

Ding!

New Quest: Shield for Kokun.

Despite all efforts, hunter Kokun failed to fix his shield. If it breaks during the fight he will be in trouble. You have to bring it to his friend Lucille to exchange for a new one.

Difficulty: E.

Restrictions: If you leave the village with the shield Kokun will get angry.

“I’ll bring you a new shield.”

You accepted the quest.

Weed believed that before doing a quest it was important to gather all available information. The shield he got was very heavy and solid.

“Now, shall we? Identification!”

Shield was all cracked and dirty, so it was hard to estimate its value from look alone. Weed was heading to the blacksmith, looking through the shield’s information window in the meanwhile.

Lucille’s Shield

Durability: 12/50.

Defence: 16.

Simple shield made of low-grade metals. It is covered by steel on the outside but very frigid on the inside. It is weak against blunt weapons. It should be replaced at first opportunity.

Requirements: None.

Effects: 50% chance to defend against projectiles.

The village wasn’t very big so it wasn’t too hard to find the blcksmith. However it didn’t look anything like Kokun described. A small furnace with an anvil in a small room with a couple swords and a few other weapons hung on the walls was all Weed saw. The only big thing there was the bearded and muscular smith Lucille.

“I see you for the first time, stranger.”

“I came here at Kokun’s request.”

Weed's relationships with villagers weren't quite on the good side, so he decided to take the initiative. However all his worries were unnecessary.

"Oh, come on in. There's a familiar smell of metal around you. I love fire, that's why I became a smith. Why did you master this craft?"

Weed quickly considered his answer. Sometimes such insignificant at first glance questions were determining your relationships with NPCs.

"I like melting cold metal and giving it a new shape."

"Good answer. So, what brought you here?"

Weed handed the shield.

"He asks for a new one."

"That's it! That idiot Kokun broke his shield again. I warned him many times to be careful... Ahem! I can't keep doing this for free. I'll give another one for 5 gold. That useless Kokun doesn't have that kind of money, so you'll have to pay instead."

"Erm..."

Weed was about to say something rude, as he felt scammed, but held himself at the last moment. It was foolish to give up on the first quest after such a long search. He convinced himself, that this is just more investments in the future.

'Hmm, I haven't been cheated like that since meeting that sage Rodrigues.'

Weed passed the gold to the smiling Lucille.

“Thanks. I just happen to have a spare shield for him. Here you go.”

Weed got the shield. The quest was complete and he was about to leave but Lucille stopped him.

“Hey, have you heard about the origins of our village?”

Weed was first to discover this settlement. Maybe that, or the fact of Weed being a smith himself, was what made Lucille to tell him this story.

“Kokun told me a bit. He stopped at the part where only a small part of exiled remained.”

“Great. Then I’ll continue. Survivors were wandering the land of monsters in search for a place to settle. Their first choice was a huge cave, but not everyone liked the idea of living in a constant darkness. Gradually more and more people were coming outside, and eventually they decided to found a village.”

“Incredible, they had the courage to start a settlement in the Plains of Despair!”

Weed wanted to show his admiration for their courage. Even in such dangerous environment the pioneering spirit of humans won!

“Nah, that wasn’t that remarkable. To tell the truth, at that moment

there were still a lot of survivors. But they had a disagreement. They've split in 2 camps: ones, who didn't want to change anything and anes who wanted to leave the cave. The latter were the ones who founded our village and later built the wall around it. Unfortunately 99 of every hundred died in the process."

"..."

That was a story for a horror movie. Unknown lands, full of dangers and a group of defenceless people...

"Yeah, that's how it all happened. Through trial and error, each of them costed human lives, the survivors acquired new knowledge. They learned which places to avoid, discovered habits of monsters and predators of this land. They started to better understand the world around them. Around that time life in the village started to become safe. Ahem, I guess I talked to much. I still have a lot of work to do. Here, this is my present for you."

You acquired the map of the plains.

This is the map of the Plains of Despair.

It displays the location of castles, villages, monster dens and cursed places.

Lucille suddenly gave Weed a very valuable item. The map of Plains of Despair and everything in them! With a roughly marked landscape and main habitats of some monster kinds.

Though it was drawn really bad, like it was done by a child who was learning to write.

“Thank you very much.”

“You’re welcome. Try to visit the village more often. The people who don’t hunt are more welcome towards strangers. It would be nice if more new people were coming here.”

Weed headed back to Kokun to deliver the shield. The hunter was waiting for him at the same place while sharpening his sword.

“Oh, you came back? You’re late. Did you bring it?”

Weed gave him the shield.

“Thanks. You did a favour to me, but I don’t have anything to give you. Though wait a second, here, take it.”

The quest “Shield for Kokun” is complete.

The hunter Kokun have already lost his shield a few times in a battle. He was always coming back from the hunt injured, but never yet he brought back anything worthy. Villagers consider him a failure.

No one know where he fights.

Reward: 20 steel arrows for the long bow. A little experience.

Weed opened the character window. The experience bar only grew by 0.001%.

You can’t expect much from a E rank difficulty quest, even with double experience bonus. If only it was one of the quests where experience depended on the completed goals...

Satisfied Kokun examined his new shield and said:

“Oh, yeah, I started telling about our village, right? Remind me where did we stop?”

“The small part of survivors founded the village. Lucille told me up to this part.”

“Hah! He sure loves to talk. Ill continue. To survive we had to become stronger. All the villagers mastered weapons, especially bows: some of us are even better at it than dark elves. What else... Our village is eastmost in the Plains of Despair. The Yuroki mountain range can be clearly seen from here, it's inhabited by numerous orcs.”

“You founded your village in a dangerous place.”

“Yeah. Most of the villages are like that. We're even relatively lucky. There's an iron mine nearby, so we can forge weapons. we have plenty of food too. Though from time to time we're getting raided by orcs.”

“Orcs?”

“Every year at harvest time they come to plunder our barns. To be honest orcs are the only reason we don't live in abundance. But sadly they are also the reason we don't have to deal with other, more dangerous monsters. So we live in poverty, but relatively safe.”

The exile settlement was holding despite annual orc raids.

“However a few years ago orcs started taking not just food, but villagers. After all they can't make anything themselves!”

“I heard that orcs are the worst race with regard to crafting.”

“That’s right. That’s why they take people away, so that they make weapons and do other work for them. In the last few years they took more than a hundred people! Damn orcs!”

“Have you tried to stop them?”

Kokun burst into laughing.

“Ha! To stop the horde?! I never heard anything dumber. Orcs love fighting, they’re unrivaled at it. They fight not only humans, but elves and giant monsters and even each other!”

“I see.”

“I tell you all this because you didn’t yet understand what a dangerous place you got into. Even our best warriors have a hard time hunting some monsters, giant ant for example. We hold a celebration if they bring one from the hunt. Do you think you can hunt 5 of them? If you manage this villagers will change their attitude towards you.”

Ding!

New quest: Kukun’s doubt.

Hunter Kokun had met a lot of people who talked big but did little. To oppose the orcs one needs not just courage but sharp mind.

Catch 5 giant ants to prove your courage.

Difficulty: C.

Reward: recognition of the villagers.

Penalty for failure: hunter Kokun won’t talk to you any more.

A new quest!

Kokun narrowed his eyes and continued:

“Let it be a test for you. I won’t be surprised if you refuse. Consider this a challenge for outsiders.”

Weed went quiet for a moment and then answered firmly:

“I’ll catch those giant ants.”

You accepted the quest.

“I sure hope so. You can find giant ants in the plains to the west. They’re easy to find. Though i’m not sure if you can run away if something goes wrong.”

Weed left the village and headed back to the hill where his men were hiding. 10 Royal knights, Buren, Becker, Hosram, Dale, 400 soldiers and 50 priests. A small army led by Weed!

“Keep waiting.”

“As you say, Chief!”

Weed stood in front of the stone at the entrance to the cave and took out his sculpting tools. He already got a hang of carving sculptures, Zahab’s

knife and a chisel were moving in his hands at an incredible speed!

He carved the familiar face that sometimes even appeared in his dreams! The face of Seoyoon served as a model for yet another sculpture.

‘I hope it ends up as another fine piece...’

Weed had big expectations. He had never yet failed at carving Seoyoon's face...

In his sculptures he tried many times to use faces of other girls, but never succeeded with it.

Because of the minor details it was hard to recreate person's face. Sometimes when looking at a beautiful face you understand that something is missing. It seems that if you make nose a bit higher or eyes bigger you'll achieve perfection.

Especially that was the case with women faces.

But in fact if start changing something you get unexpected results. By doing minor changes you change overall balance. That's why the 'fixed' result usually ends up inferior to the original.

For every failed work sculptor's fame was decreasing. Weed wished to avoid that, so he was only carving Seoyoon's face. Her appearance was so flawless, that just by changing the expression a little he could change the overall atmosphere.

This time Weed decided to carve Seoyoon as a fearsome warrior.

For the clothes and armor he used the equipment of northern mercenaries, he heard that there are many female mercenaries among them.

The fierce and confident Seoyoon with a sword in front of her looked like she was guarding the entrance from dangerous monsters. That was a perfect image of a worthy and proud mercenary.

Ding!

Fine piece! You finished the statue of female mercenary!

The northern lands are poor and unfit for farming, so a lot of northern women become mercenaries to protect their homes and earn some money. They never retreat and always finish their assigned tasks.

With weapons in their hands they fearlessly slay the most dangerous monsters of the north! Ever since knights became too arrogant the peacekeeping duty fell on mercenaries' shoulders.

Artistic value: 600.

Effects:

- Health and mana regeneration increased by 15% for a day.
- Movement speed increased by 15%.
- Charisma increased by 100.
- Strength increased by 10.
- Agility increased by 10.
- All attributes increased by 5.
- For a week after seeing the statue you can take a mission at the mercenary guild on better terms.
- Experience gain increased by 5%.

These effects do not stack with effects of other sculptures.

The number of created fine pieces: 5.

Sculpture mastery experience points gained.

Fame increased by 85.

Endurance increased by 1.

New attribute: Charisma!

Charisma:

this attribute represents the ability to attract people. Primarily those of opposing sex. You become more attractive and charming. One of the main attributes for bards, dancers and party leaders. If your profession is related to crafting, charisma will help you to create more detailed works.

Due to your profession, your charisma attribute is raised by 20.

Fortitude raised by 5.

Seoyoon's image didn't fail him this time either.

'Hmm, this sculpture doesn't affect combat performance much, but it increases experience gain, which is not bad as well.'

And he also got a new attribute that influenced Weed's sculpture skill, an unexpected but pleasant gift.

"Hmmm..."

Weed tried to examine the reflection of his face in the knife's blade to see if it changed after the new attribute appeared.

Then he took his best-looking pose and addressed his soldiers.

"Gather everyone. We're moving out!"

Weed and his army headed out into plains to hunt giant ants.

“Priests, prepare for battle, bless the warriors.”

“Yes. Freya, please give your faithful servants power to fight against evil, Bless!”

Priests used group blessing. Order of Freya have sent their best priests with Weed so blessing 400 soldiers at once wasn't a problem for them.

But Weed still decided to act careful. He believed that if he was to throw simple soldiers into the fight from the start there'd be no way to avoid losses, despite the support of Freya's priests.

“Knights move ahead with me, the rest of you follow us at a certain distance.”

The Royal Knights were grumbling but still following Weed's orders.

“We will obey for now.”

“Until we finish our mission we have to listen to you. But don't get the idea that we do it out of respect.”

Weed was ignored in the village! Now he was ignored here as well!

Weed sighed to himself and without a word let the knights ahead to search for the ants.

When he was listening to Kokun he didn't take him seriously. Well, the ants were big, they were hard to catch, so what? However after seeing those monsters he couldn't hold his surprise:

“Woah, they're really huge!”

Though ordinary ants were 1 cm long, the monsters that were running around the plains in front of them were easily over a few meters long. And they were moving extremely fast!

“Don't get bothered by their size, go! Attack!”

Accompanied by knights, Weed rushed towards monsters. But they were moving just too fast. In one step they were passing a few meters and were often making sharp turns.

Knights had to be extremely careful to avoid a frontal attack of moving at top speed ants.

Weed couldn't help but feel frustrated.

‘I spent so many reputation points on them, and this all I got...’

Knights weren't able to kill even a single ant! The brave warriors were just running in circles trying to dodge rushing monsters.

“We need to slow down the ants! Priests, use slows!”

“Will be done, oh devoted one.”

Thankfully, Weed's faith helped him to command the priests. They were executing his orders quickly and accurately.

50 priests simultaneously recited prayers:

"The beauty of Freya stops everyone in their steps. So be it! By the power of our faith, Slow!"

Bizarre anti-blessing of priests started to work. The movements of giant ants started to slow down more and more. The prayers of 50 priests added up and the resulting spell was a lot more powerful than the prayer of a single priest.

After a few seconds ants froze in place.

"Knights, attack! Archers, start shooting! The rest, guard the priests."

"Yes!"

A hundred of soldiers pulled their bows and released a swarm of arrows at the frozen monsters. Ants were so big, that it was very easy to aim at them.

The remaining 300 soldiers were guarding the priests. And Weed rushed to attack the ants.

They had to hurry, as priests had to constantly spend mana to keep the slow spell up.

‘We can’t let this drag for too long.’

Archers’ attacks were gradually reducing monsters’ health.

‘They’re so big that arrows are like mosquito bites for them...’

Along with Weed the knights rushed to attack the ants. They were climbing on top of them and breaking open their shells with swords. Some were cutting off their legs.

Weed followed others’ example and climbed on the ant’s head. That was dangerous but danger didn’t stop him. He was hacking the monsters along with the knights.

Giant ants were holding for a long time.

Sometimes they were managing to weaken the slowing spells of the priests and shake the knights off them. Every time that happened Weed’s heart was skipping a beat. Fortunately Knights weren’t dying so easy, so after the fall they were getting back up, receiving some healing from priests and going back into fight.

In such manner an hour since the start of the fight Weed’s little army finished the last giant ant.

You have Level up.
You receive giant and chitin shell.

You receive giant ant antennae. You can use them to find the cave where the queen of giant ants is hidden.

“Excellent.”

Only after defeating the ants Weed realized that their level was over 350.

“They’re ridiculously strong.”

It took quite a lot of skill to fight such strong monsters. It was fortunate that because of his high fame and previously completed tasks his level was quite high.

After gathering all the loot and leading his army back to their hideout Weed headed back to the village of exiles.

There he showed the ant shells to Kokun.

“I didn’t expect much. Thought you were just another braggart. But I was wrong, you really defeated the giant ants.”

Kokun carefully examined the ant shells brought by Weed.

“Amazing. By dealing with them you proved that you’re really an outstanding warrior. No one will doubt you any more.”

Ding!

You have completed a quest: 'Kokun's doubt'.

In the whole village of exiles only a few people ever managed to hunt 5 giant ants. And those people are called the greatest warriors and the main protectors of the village. Now Kokun will spread the news of another great warrior among the villagers.

Reward:

- Kokun's knife.
- Experience points.
- Fame increased by 6.

This time too Weed checked the experience bar. For this quest he was awarded 15% of experience bar. But the most important was the fact that the villagers will finally start to accept him.

"This is my knife. Now it belongs to you. Such a great warrior like you is always a welcome friend for me."

Kokun took out a small knife and passed it to Weed.

" ... "

That was the most dirty and dull blade Weed ever saw in the game.

"And what do I need it for?"

"It's handy for removing bark from trees. Very useful knife."

Weed decided not to reply, he already had Zahab's knife and Kokun's gift was of no use to him.

“I’ll continue my story about our village. The place where it’s located is really very dangerous. If you act rashly you can easily lose your life. That’s why you should never underestimate orcs. Since early childhood they’re trained to fight monsters, very strong monsters... It can be said that orcs rule these lands.”

“Got it. Avoid the orcs.”

“That’s right, if you value your life at least. However high in the Yuroki mountains live dark elves, Moreover recently some dark creatures that use magic appeared and allied themselves with elves.”

Weed’s gaze became keener.

“Could you tell me more about that?”

“Village’s hunters, like me, aren’t that aware of what happens in the Yuroki mountains. But we saw many times how orcs fight with dark elves. Almost every time orcs were winning, even though elves use dark magic and summoned spirits. But ever since those dark creatures appeared, orcs started to lose more fights. A lot more fights. Moreover, the slain orcs were rising and attacking their own kind. I almost got killed a few times when I watched such battles.”

Weed was well aware what kind of dark creatures were allied with dark elves. The necromancers of bar Khan Demoff.

“Dark elves started to win. They even built walls, fort and then a fortress and towers in the mountains. Thought that seems strange, isn’t it?”

“Right.”

Elves were the race who lived in harmony with world and nature.

And even though dark elves loved to fight, they still lived in natural environment. Why would they move into a fortress?

“I have a feeling that elves are preparing for a war. Are they going to start the full scale war with orcs and are hiding something behind those walls? I don’t know anything, I can only guess. However one thing I can tell for sure: ever since elves got support nights in our lands became longer.”

“Longer?”

“At certain time dark clouds emerge from elven fortress, and they cover the entire sky. The time for which we can see the sun keeps reducing. Take a look in the evening and you’ll see for yourself.”

That’s how Weed learned the rough situation in the Plains of Despair.

“By the way, if you meet brother and sister Moss and Amy in the village, don’t talk to them about the shape shifting monsters. Now I need to go hunting.”

Kokun picked up his shield, waved his head and left the village.

Chapter 6: Sculpture Transformation

Weed was slowly walking through the village.

After he successfully completed the quest, villagers stopped ignoring him.

“We respect strong fighters. You need a lot of power to protect friends and family.”

“They say you killed 5 Giant Ants? Incredible! I have something to be done, will you help me when you’re free?”

Weed was getting small requests from villagers and at the same time getting to know more about the situation in the village. For example, the Village of Exiles didn’t have any stores, and the villagers were buying things from each other.

‘Hmmm, I won’t be able to do much trading around here.’

While exploring the village, Weed noticed a crying boy. For some reason, he immediately thought that it was Moss, mentioned by Cocoon. Especially since there weren’t that many kids in the village.

“What happened?”

Weed approached him and asked the boy, but he shook his head.

“You’re a stranger. Strangers don’t need to know that.”

“ ... ”

That was a very cold reception. However, Weed was persistent. When you’re denied something, it only makes you want it more!

“A lot of monsters live around this village. I heard there are even shape-shifting monsters, maybe you got hurt by one of them?”

After hearing about the monsters, the boy immediately raised his head. Tears on his face went dry, and his eyes shone with hatred.

“Have you ever hunted shape-shifting monsters before?”

“Of course. I hunted many monsters.”

“Then help us. Those monsters... those damn monsters are after my sister.”

Weed felt that there was definitely a quest associated with this conversation.

“Tell me more about what happened.”

“Actually...”

The boy vividly told about his problem.

The monsters that were attacking the village saw his sister Amy. The Doppelganger that led them fell in love with her at first sight.

“I like you human! I will feed you as much as you want if you come with me!”

The leader of the Doppelgangers was inviting Amy to his lair but she was persistent in her rejection. She didn’t want to leave her older brother Moss.

Then Doppelganger turned into her brother Moss, copying his face and body, becoming his perfect copy.

“Will this do? Will you come with me now?”

“To live with a monster, whose original form is long since forgotten? I'd rather bite off my tongue and die!”

Amy threatened to end her life and Doppelganger reluctantly retreated.

He liked her a lot. And in the Plains of Despair, monsters usually got what they wanted.

“Fine, human. I can wait. I'll give you 3 years, after that I will take you with me! And if you refuse then, I'll slay every person in this village.”

The time given by the Doppelganger was running out in 3 months.

Moss was pleading with tears in his eyes.

“Please don’t let them take my sister. I don’t have anything to give you, but please help me. Those Doppelgangers live in the woods to the north.”

Ttiring!

Doppelganger covets a village beauty.
Monsters think of humans as things.
The leader of Doppelgangers likes the girl Amy.
Kill him so she doesn't get taken away!
Difficulty: C.
Reward: Unknown.
Conditions: Moss and Amy must survive.

‘That means I’ll fight shape-shifting Doppelgangers soon.’

Usually Weed would just refuse this quest. The reward was unknown and Doppelgangers were very unpleasant opponents. They use magic and often can do something completely unexpected.

However, the boy’s tears reminded Weed of his past.

When his parents died, he was left only with his grandmother and his younger sister. It seemed like the world had ended back then. He had no one to rely on. He wanted some support but there was no one to provide it.

That’s why he understood Moss’s feeling very well. If he had someone to ask for help back then only to get rejected his life would be ruined completely.

Weed nodded and replied:

“I’ll protect Amy for sure.”

You accepted the quest.

“Thank you, stranger!”

Moss smiled for the first time since they met.

*

Weed left the village and headed towards the hideout.

From their peaceful kingdom, brave warriors of Rosenheim got right into the middle of Plains of Despair.

And in their first battle, they had to fight Giant Ants! To survive they had to give it their all. They won in that battle, kept their lives and as a reward

all of them got 2-3 levels.

Soldiers' faith in Weed was absolute.

"Commander! Where are we going now?"

"The innocent people of nearby village are being harassed by a Doppelganger, it threatens them and wants to take a beautiful girl Amy from her older brother Moss."

"We must stop them." - replied Hosram in a firm voice.

The Royal Knights were touched by the story too.

"It is knight's duty to protect weak, we will follow you."

"I can't tolerate that a young girl is suffering from an evil monster."

"Please take us with you, we will definitely stop Doppelganger."

The small army headed to the northern woods, where the Doppelganger lived. Sunlight couldn't penetrate the thick canopy of trees to dispel the darkness below. Many dangerous monsters inhabited these woods and sometime ghastly sounds could be heard.

"The earth is tainted."

"This forest is cursed."

The priests' warnings didn't stop Weed.

"Summon Death Knight!"

Death Knight Van Hawk remained in front of the troops.

"Oh, a familiar place."

The Death Knight walked valiantly.

And shortly after they discovered the Doppelganger. They could tell it was the Doppelganger because it had the same appearance as the boy Moss. Weed and the soldiers eagerly attacked the Doppelganger.

During the fight, the Doppelganger changed his form a few times. By alternating the skills used against the soldiers, Royal Knights and Van Hawk, it endured. The variety of skills it used was enough to cause

confusion, but thanks to the combination of Weed and the Death Knight along with the Priests' healing, the soldiers were able to win.

Weed and the soldiers eagerly took on quests.

All kinds of monsters emerged around the Village of Exiles. Giant Ants, Doppelgangers and so on, usually discovering the monsters at the start was the hardest part. The missions asked of them involved killing bizarre plants, animals and flame monsters within caves.

"Commander, we'll serve under you!"

"Commander, we'll follow you anywhere!"

Weed seduced the soldiers! In fact, the power of the soldiers did not help much early on. The reason being they were too weak. However, while hunting strong monsters one by one, they were getting stronger at a very fast pace. The mastery of the Royal Knights rose and the pincer movement with the Priests was done smoothly.

The army's morale changed dramatically. At first, the soldiers didn't trust in Weed much and weren't providing much help as they were weak. But time was passing and the more they hunted the stronger they became. Weed in the central role was sweating due to the light. Hunting the large monsters around and sweeping through the quests was Weed!

There were plenty of perilous moments, but Weed successfully resolved the quest and went on. And then the experience climbed at a very fast rate. When hunting just one of the monsters, a certain amount of experience and items will drop. But when you receive a hunting quest, in addition to when you catch the monsters, the quest experience rewards were very savory. The experience they received was practically 3 times as much as they would receive in Rosenheim Kingdom.

'I guess because it's somewhat dangerous.'

However, the drawback to the quests was the poor quality of things received.

In areas with poorly developed technology, all the produced items were of poor quality. That's why when Weed was receiving weapons as reward

he was giving it to Royal Knights or soldiers.

“Thanks Commander.”

“I’ll be sure to use it well.”

Every time Weed gave away some item, he was crying inside. It was very hard to take the item you gave to NPC back without your intimacy declining sharply.

‘Inevitable but...’

After hunting in the Plains of Despair he reached level 279. Even the soldiers rose their levels significantly, the Royal Knights and Priests were also quite strong. However, with the Orcs and Dark Elves as the opponent, they were woefully lacking.

*

Orcs!

The word Orc immediately brought a few images to mind. Greedy and tenacious race. With strong obsession they were vengeful opponents. Quickly multiplying like cockroaches and good at fighting. The Orcs were at least in the thousands, maybe even the tens of thousands!

“Urgh!”

Back in the cave Weed groaned helplessly. The hunt around the village was going well, but how was he supposed to defeat armies of Orcs, Dark Elves and Necromancers?

His subordinates were at best 4 Centurions, 400 soldiers and 10 Royal Knights. Of course he had 50 Priests, but their power was only helpful when supporting the fighting troops to some extent.

After a number of runs, the usefulness of the Royal Knight could be considered similar to Freya’s Paladins to some extent. Going right up the Yuroki Mountains with just this amount of power, they are bound to surely die. They will die at the hands of the Orcs before even meeting the Necromancers.

Enemies on all sides.

Orcs and Necromancers were definitely enemies!

But the Dark Elves were allied with the Necromancers.

Weed was thinking hard. Usually he was very sharp and knew well when to flatter or keep silent to earn more money, but now he was struggling to find any solution to this situation.

‘The enemies are strong but they’re not exactly close to each other.’

Finally in Weed’s head from a fiction book he read at some unknown time in childhood a sentence emerged.

The enemy of my enemy is my friend!

The moment he recalled that sentence, it seemed like the fog in his mind started to clear. Like a bright ray of light appeared in the darkness of hopelessness.

Weed wasn’t that much into complicated novels. The more complex the book was the harder his head ached after reading it. Therefore he liked simple, clear, cheerful stories, which he mainly read. Fantasy, adventures and comics!

‘Books never lie.’

The next idea that came to his head he encountered in comics a few times. And if he combines it with his sculpture mastery it could lead to something interesting.

‘Won’t hurt to just try.’

Weed left the cave and started looking for a big stone. There were a lot of stones around but he needed one of a certain size.

‘Not this one, I need one higher than me.’

Finally he found a stone about 3 meters high.

Zahab’s Carving Knife moved quickly cutting through the rock.

Gradually an odd shape started to appear from the stone. It was neither Seoyoon, who was the usual motive of Weed’s works, nor some object. It was a creature alive and moving. Warlike and greedy species.

Orc!

However, while working on the sculpture, Weed became plunged in distress.

‘Orcs are greedy. But I mean, I don’t understand the greed. Greedy for what? Peaceful and beautiful world, I have no idea on the activities and excessive obsession of selfish and greedy creatures.’

For a perfect sculpture, it is very important to understand the target. Weed did not know how the heck to understand Orcs.

It was surely not going to be easy to understand Orcs more than humans. The created statue was made in the form of a modest Orc. It was roughly the shape of an exemplary Orc. While sculpting various monsters, he had never sculpted an Orc, so as much as possible he faithfully resurrected the memories of time.

Unassuming and ordinary statue. Somewhat docile and awkward Orc was being created. Then one moment that happened some time ago suddenly emerged. The big incident where a whopping 5 gold had been blown to obtain a shield for Cocoon. Back then there was no other way, but still.

At that time he was expecting to receive a reward for the quest. But when he actually completed the quest, all he gained was from Cocoon was a story, a few words and a knife. He entered 5 gold and failed to even get 1 copper back. He seemed to fall over in regret.

Money! Money! Money! Money! Money!

Obsession over 5 lost gold! Greed! Obsession! Desire! Grudge!

"Euaaaaa!"

Weed moved the carving knife brilliantly. The statue became filled with life. Selfish wrinkles under the eyes, gaping mouth ready to devour and a pig nose filled with desire.

‘Preferably a little stronger, show significant muscle, add scar marks to make him more life-like!’

‘I think I’ll make his muscles bigger so he looks tougher and add scar marks so he’s more life-like!’

Perfect combat type Orc statue.

As special image settings, he made the teeth large and thick. And then a larger size and grotesque nose, eyes filled with selfishness, the Orc statue was born. A face that even kept the devil away, it was hard to keep your eyes open and the body covered with muscles was at least twice as great as a normal Orc.

Ttiring!

Fine Piece! You completed the Monster Orc statue!

An artist with normal sense would absolutely fail to create such a statue. Completed with excellent dexterity, but it seems it would be better to put it in storage without having it see the light of day.

Artistic value: 1.

Special Effects:

- Gazing at the Orc statue will increase health and mana regeneration by 5% for a day.
- Movement speed increased by 15%.
- Intellect decreased by 10.
- Charm decreased by 200.
- Strength increased by 20.
- Agility increased by 10.
- Charisma increased by 60.
- Leadership increased by 50.
- Can stop the crying of a crying child.
- Those with low courage, just by looking at the Orc statue will become severely atrophic.

Effects don’t stack with other sculptures.

Until now completed number of Fine Pieces: 6.

- - Mastery of Sculpting skill has risen.
- - Fame increased by 46.
- - Fighting Spirit increased by 1.
- - Endurance increased by 3
- - Charisma increased by 3.
- - Fortitude increased by 5.

The Orc statue was completed. The low artistic value bothered him a

little, but Weed regarded it fortunate that it wasn't an abomination. Even though he created it, he feared such a dreadful Orc would emerge in his dreams.

Looking at the statue head on, regardless of the reason, he wanted to smash it! He wanted to shatter it with Destruction Sculpture on the spot!

'But I painstakingly created it, so it's like my child...'

Weed's heart was captivated. However, even with affection, he would have to adapt as much as possible to the damn statue.

Weed instead of using Destruction Sculpture cast another skill. The first use of Daron's sculpture skill! The secret art!

"Sculpture Transformation!"

You have used Sculpture Transformation.

The sculpture skill that uses boundless affection to make the sculptor resemble the sculpture.

Weed's appearance gradually changed.

His height increasingly grew and rugged muscles were created. Hair grew covering his entire body, and then after a while, his appearance completely into an Orc. Even the back of his hands and the inside of his feet was completely Orc. Height obstinately grew, changing his eye level. The thickness of the limbs was different and he gained a plentiful belly.

"Successful? Chwiik!"

Until now he was able to speak normally. But now the exclusive property of Orcs, the chwiik sound emerged.

"This, chwiiik. Strange. Chwichichichiik!"

Weed tried to keep his mouth shut but his teeth were too large to close it.

Body type has changed, many of the worn equipment are unable to be used.
After the reverse transformation you will be able to equip it again.
Whole body can wear iron armor or heavy clothing.
Depending on the type of species, new equipment must be obtained.

Due to Sculpture Transformation, strength and agility slightly increase.

Intellect and wisdom will fall to the lowest level.

Art stat is reduced by half.

Charisma rises significantly.

Will remain valid until Sculpture Transformation is released.

He confirmed through the character window. Strength, agility and vitality increased, whereas other stats reduced slightly. The blow was especially great in art and wisdom. In addition, with the exception of his sword and cape, all his armor and gloves could not be worn.

“In transformed state, choeik! I won’t be able to use? Chwiiii!”

The race itself was different so it couldn’t be helped. Trudge. Weed unfamiliar with his steps climbed the Yuroki Mountains filled with Orcs. He walked with steps like a waddling duck, but with his great height, he was immediately able to climb the mountain.

Chapter 7: Simple-minded Orc Karichwi

Mountains were swarming with Orcs!

Orc scouts. Orc champions. Orc warriors.

In the past Weed had been in lots of different situations and thought he'd keep his cool whatever happens, but now even he couldn't stay unfazed.

'If they see through my act - I'm done for.'

Weed was soaked with sweat, as he was climbing up the mountain slope.

However brave one considered himself, it would be hard to match your behavior, when there're only Orcs all around.

There were Orcs in Rosenheim kingdom too, but their levels ranged from 80 to 130. So you could always run away from them if something went wrong.

Here, in Plains of despair, monsters were much stronger. Even Goblins and Cobolds, which were considered the weakest monsters in the game, had different combat strength depending on the area they lived in.

And in this land Orcs had to fight for their territory since childhood. They were fighting giant monsters, so their level and therefore strength far exceeded that of their brethren from Rosenheim kingdom.

But the scariest part was not their strength, but their countless numbers! If something was to go wrong here and he has to run away, he'll be chased by thousands of Orcs.

Weed had no intention of experiencing 'death by Orcs' hands in Plains of Despair'. That's why he tried to be careful not to attract any attention.

"Chwiiiik!"

Weed accidentally met the gaze of one of the Orcs standing in front of him. Level 210 Orc champion! Even some knights, known for their honor, like to stare others down to show their superiority, and this was an Orc captain.

“Chwiiik!”

Orc glared at Weed, his eyes glowing with malice.

‘I’m in trouble.’

Orc’s rude attitude made Weed frown.

‘I can’t blow my cover...’

First of all Weed decided to smile. A reliable approach, that never before failed to help him to establish a friendly relationship. A great interpersonal skill.

Weed made his best fake smile.

But he wasn’t quite used to his new appearance, so he involuntary knit his brows and the corners of his mouth were trembling a little. His oversized fangs shifted forward even more.

At that moment Orc champion looked away!

“Chwik! Chwik! Chwik!”

He got scared! Weed’s appearance alone managed to scare an Orc captain, so he said with a hint of superiority: “Be careful next time. Chwiiik!”

“I will. Chwik. Chwik. Chwik.”

On Weed’s way up the mountain such incidents repeated a few more times. In front of Weed’s fearsome stature and appearance other Orcs were cringing in fear.

That way without any hindrances Weed reached the place, where Orcs were fighting a monster.

“I’ll kill everyone, everyone! Cwichwik!”

“Chwiiik! This is our land!”

A few dozen Orcs were fighting a giant fire monster - a mix of a mantis and a centipede! It was breathing fire and crushing opponents with his weight.

Orcs were relentlessly swinging their glaives, but couldn't pierce the thick skin of their foe.

The fire giant had level 280 - a very dangerous opponent. There were countless monster like this one in the Plains of Despair. That's why this region was considered one of the most dangerous on the continent!

Weed watched the Orcs' battle. No wonder they say that you can watch two things forever: a burning fire and a real fight!

'If all Orcs die, I'll get their items...'

Besides Weed was now left without any armor and it could be said that he was standing there naked.

Weed had to wait for the battle to end.

The fire giant was moving around at a great speed, coiling his entire body and breathing fire at nearby opponents. Orcs were dying one after another.

Weed was watching it calmly, when a realization came to his mind: 'I'm not a human now. On my place no Orc would be able to mercilessly watch his kin die.'

Weed rushed forward, grabbing one of the dropped glaives on the way.

"Iyahap!"

He struck the distracted giant in the side with all his might. The giant, like a building, monster fell, rising a cloud of dust. Even after becoming an Orc Weed didn't lose his strength and skill!

The fire giant acknowledged his new opponent. It hastily crawled aside, got up and rushed towards the new threat. Bursting with flames enemy was quickly approaching!

Weed instinctively jumped high into the air and landed on giant's head.

"Sculpting, Chwiik! Blade, Chwiiik!"

Even in the Orc's body he was able to use the Sculpting Blade technique, but because of his lowered intelligence his mana was running out quickly.

On the other hand he was a lot stronger now.

Weed has swung the glaive down on the monsters head with all his might and just barely scratched it.

The glaive blade wasn't very sharp, but with every hit the wound on the giant's head was getting deeper.

“Kuwo-o-o-o-o!”

The fire giant was jumping and spinning its head, trying to throw Weed off.

If he was to fall, he'll be in a very bad situation. Weed knew it, so he firmly secured his legs position and was dealing one blow after another while maintaining balance.

Moster was raging so much, that it almost managed to shake Weed off, but in the last moment he managed to grab its antennae.

“Die already, Chwiiik!”

Of course hanging from a head of the head of the giant monster was a lot harder than from a handrail on a bus. But Weed's training helped him not to fall off. He had perfect control over his body! When you have a foothold, you can properly use force. Weed clung to the giant's head like a cockroach and continued to deal blows.

Other Orcs weren't idling as well.

“We, Chwiik, got backup!”

“Chwiiik! To battle!”

Orcs attacked the monster, swinging their weapons.

The fire giant was breathing fire, twisting and jumping, but still couldn't stand against the united attack of Weed and Orcs and finally fell to the ground, dead.

Ding!

You have leveled up.
Hunting a giant in Yuroki mountains raised your Fame by 1.

Weed cried out happily!

It's been a while since it happened to him on the hunt last time. Before, when he was immersed in battle over his head, he was often letting out occasional cries of joy.

“Chwiiiik!”

“Chwichwichwiiik!”

Orcs started screaming delightfully as well.

A view, worthy of a great artist: Weed, standing on a giant's head, and a happily screaming crowd of Orcs around him. From the side it looked like they joined forces to accomplish impossible!

But after every victory there was a very important thing to do.

Weed collected the loot.

You received the Skin from the back of Fire Giant.

After processing this material could be used to create armor. The armor, made from it will be lighter and a lot tougher than tempered steel, such materials were very hard to acquire.

“Thanks! Chwiik!”

“Chwichwichwit, you saved us.”

Orcs gathered around Weed and were thanking him. He helped them in time of great danger and they were very grateful to him. However even in such a moment some Orcs were looking away from him from time to time.

Such face wasn't easy to get used to!

But Weed was reassured by such reaction.

“Chwiik, you hunt such critters? Chwiit, you should have called me. I love fighting. Chwichwichwiiik! I love gems and good items even more.”

“Chwii. We admit. You are a warrior. We are proud of you, Orc warrior.”

Similarities attract - this rule was working even in game.

Orcs, who liked to fight and hoard the most, immediately liked Weed.

“I see you for the first time. Where did you come from? Chwiiik!”

“I don’t know. Chwi!”

Weed looked somewhere into the distance of plains with sad eyes. And though he tried to look as sad as possible, for everyone else it looked like he thinks of past bloody battles and slaughters.

“When i was 1 year old, my mother left this place with me. Chwik! We lived in plains. And now i returned. Chwiiik! Don’t ask any more.”

“As you say. Chwiik!”

“Let’s go hunt. Chwiik!”

“Okay. Chwi!”

Weed took the invitation and joined the Orcs’ party.

Anywhere, even among monsters Weed felt himself at home! Weed was master at assessing the situation and evaluating possible profit, whether it was a free serving of rice porridge or a free ride on the train. Since he was a child various difficulties he had to endure taught him to think outside the box and quickly adapt to situation.

“Wo-o-o-ah!”

“Chwiik, chwiik!”

*

All over Yuroki mountains Orc villages were scattered.

And after the hunt warriors from the party Weed joined invited him to their place.

“Chwiiit! Come with us.”

“May I? Chwik! Chwiik!”

“Yeah. Our family is big. Chwichwichwit. Good warriors, chwiiik, are welcome.”

“Chwik! Thanks, friend.”

Weed followed the Orcs deep into the mountains.

On their way he saw a lot of other settlements, big like human cities. They didn't have walls or castles, but had many big buildings. One such houses housed 10 Orcs, and there were more than a 1000 buildings in a settlement.

Orcs led Weed into one of such settlements. At the entrance Weed was stopped by guards.

"Not just anyone is allowed to enter. Chwiik!"

Weed looked at them calmly and said:

"You got a problem? Chwiik!"

An Orc-like demon! With the scariest face in the world.

Weed's appearance was his best pass anywhere. And his companions tried to defend him too.

"This is our friend. Chwiik! We fought together. Chwik!"

"H-he is still n-not allowed. Chwik!"

"Chwiiik. He must call his name. Chwik! Then he can enter."

Though guards' hands were trembling, they still managed to give proper reply.

Weed stopped for a moment to think. To completely get into the role of an Orc he must get a new name. He completely forgot about it.

"I am Kari... chwi!"

He hastily thought of a new name - Kari, but his body failed him again and Orcs heard a different thing.

"Karichwi! Karichwi! Chwiik. Come inside."

That is how Weed became Karichwi, as Orcs' names often ended in '-chwi'.

'That's how it is.'

Kari or Karichwi, it didn't matter for him.

Weed forgot the incident and entered the settlement.

*

“Chwiiiik! Selling cheap.”

“Chwik! Selling even cheaper!”

“Chwiit! I sell cheap too.”

A lot of things in the Orc village was similar to human settlements.

Orcs were selling armor and weapons in their stores. Most of the items were made here, in this settlement, so they were of poor quality.

But the prices were sky-high.

“Chwik. This rusty cracked glaive, chwiiiik! You want it? Everyone wants it. I’ll give it to you just for 60 000 gold. Chwiik!”

The glaive with attack power of 20 and 10 remaining points of durability costed 60 000 gold! Outrageous scam. Simple Orcs thought, that if they call high prices they’ll become rich quickly. That is why they tried to sell everything at ridiculous prices.

The cheapest herbs costed 20 000 gold, and cheapest armor - 50 000. Glaives, that were more or less useful, were priced at 150 000 gold and more.

Weed was very curious, so he asked one of his companions:

“Chwiik. Do they really manage to sell anything?”

“Chwichwichwi. Never saw it once. Chwii. Stupid idiots.”

“Chwiik. Oh, you are certainly not like them.”

Orc, praised by Weed, shrugged.

“Of course. Chwiik! If it’s not getting sold, you should ask at least 2 million gold!”

“...”

Weed was speechless.

But even harder challenge was awaiting him. Female Orcs from the

village! By human standards Weeds appearance was terrifying, but in this place he was popular.

“Strong hands. Chwichichwi!”

“Powerful chest. Chwichichiik.”

“Thick fangs, harder than an axe.”

“With jaw like that his throat won’t run dry in the rain. Chwiik! And look at his nose!”

“Wide shoulders and muscular body.”

“My ideal. Chwiiiik!”

Women were leaning against Weed, displaying their affection. Some of them were winking at him, others were caressing their chest.

Even the bravest man would be scared in this situation. Such an insistent affection made Weed wish to leave the settlement as soon as possible.

Even though they were women, they was a huge crowd of them!

“What are they doing? Chwiik!”

“Women love strong. They love you. Chwiik!” - replied one of his companions with envy.

*

Living with Orcs in one house, Weed was tormented most by two things.

First was females.

At any time of day and night they were tirelessly trying to get his love. They were doing everything a woman in life could think of.

That would never happen to an underage. But Weed was officially recognized to be over 20, so his account was adjusted accordingly.

For adults in the game there were provided special services. The night life. Pleasures, available only for adults!

But who would want to share a bed with an Orc? Surely not Weed.

‘I can’t lose my virginity like this!’

He was trying to avoid meeting females at all cost.

The second thing was food.

Orcs were eating half-raw, barely cooked food. Weed, who was almost addicted to good food because of his high cooking skill, couldn’t get used to the tastes of his new brethren.

The tasteless barley bread was a lot better. He was often dreaming about it now.

Though sometimes there were breaks in his torment, for example, when they were coming out of the settlement to hunt. Weed was always going first, marching with his glaive raised high.

“Chwiik! I smell enemy!”

They encountered the Minotaur Lord! Huge, horned monster with an axe. And even though the Minotaur Lord was menacingly swinging his weapon, that didn’t stop Weed.

“Chwichwii-i-i-ik!”

Weed tightened his grip on the glaive and rushed forward. Simple, ignorant, aggressive and merciless Orc led his party into fight.

“All, all, all, attack! Chwi-i-i-ik!”

*

Yoon Chunhee was logging into Royal Road every night.

She was a summoner and her in-game name was Seirin. At character creation she picked the half-elf race, so she had small height, like a dwarf.

“With the power of our contract I summon you. Come, Basilisk!”

Casting the summoning spell took almost all of her mana, but 3 basilisk helpers appeared besides her. These monsters looked like lizards. They were poisonous and had good defence, so she was always summoning them when hunting.

With basilisks’ help it became a lot easier for her and her partner to deal

with 2 knights.

Female thief finished last of the knights with a backstab.

“Phew! We won somehow.”

The thief wiped sweat out of her forehead and approached Seirin.

“Good job, sister.”

“You too, Lami.”

Seirin and Lami were sisters with 3 year age difference.

“Pheew, let’s rest a bit.”

“Yeah. And i need to restore mana.”

They were hunting in a newly discovered dungeon. Because of their high levels they were first to discover it and now were trying to use the received bonuses to the fullest.

Sisters were sitting on the ground and talking.

“Hey! Remember that guy that came to our school at the festival? His name is Lee Hyun. He’s the older brother of my friend, Hayan. He’s of the same age as you, isn’t he?”

Seirin smiled slightly.

“True.”

“You know him?”

“Yes. I do. Met his sister too.”

“I see... But you’re not usually interested in guys, even popular actors. And you’re not going out with anyone...”

“I’m just not interested in them.”

“So, you’re interested in him?”

“Him - yes.”

Seirin never hid anything from her sister, as they had good relationships, and Lami continued to question her.

“Could it be... he’s the one you like?”

“You guessed right.”

“Woah! Didn’t know that’s your ideal. So you like athletic guys?”

Lami couldn’t forget as well how Lee Hyun passed 3 challenges and won the princess saving competition. No one, who saw it, would ever forget.

When Lee Hyun was passing the 3 challenges, he was moving and popping flying water balloons so fast, that i seemed like a magic trick.

“Not because he’s athletic. No. I didn’t know he’s like that.”

“Then why do you like him?”

Lami was very curious.

If not his athleticism, then what could it be? His face and height were pretty average, and there were rumors that he didn’t finish the school.

“He’s a family man. He’s always thinking about his family first, cares for it. If you marry someone like him, you’ll always be happy. Right?”

*

“What do you do for a living?”

The guy scratched the back of his head and replied the girl:

“Nothing.”

“Woah. Not even going to university?”

“I do... But it’s boring and i think I’ll drop out.”

“There’s nothing to be proud of... You should have stayed silent about it.”

The girl got up. She was about to leave the room when she heard something that stopped her.

“What’s the point of going to university? I’ll be working at my father’s company anyway.”

“Father’s company?”

The girl suddenly started to like that guy.

She was sure, that she was the most beautiful girl in the club today.

“Yeah, well, that’s just a small company though.”

“How small is it?”

“Well, there’s about as many employees as people in a small town.”

“...”

“The sales... or what’s that called? Anyway it’s about same of a small city.”

“..!”

The girl was speechless.

She examined the guy’s clothes and it looked like it was true.

‘Dressed in all the brand clothes. Even shoes are from the latest collection, sold only by reservation.’

The guy handed her the phone.

“Put in your number.”

“I’m not that kind of girl.”

“I see. That’s why I would like to talk to you more.”

He easily got her number.

When the girl left the room the other guys started to talk excitedly.

“You rock, Jihoon!”

“This time it was under 5 minutes.”

The girl was outstandingly beautiful.

Even if the waiter didn’t present her as a ‘rare beauty’, one look at her made all the guys in the room feel like wolves.

But Choi Jihoon didn’t react much.

‘I won’t even remember her tomorrow anyway.’

His friend thought he was very lucky to have a life like that, but Choi Jihoon only felt boredom.

When you have a lot of money you have to be able to manage it. That's why his parents planned his life for him since childhood.

As a future heir he wasn't allowed to choose his friends, do what he likes, live like he wants.

Since he was a kid he was moving through his life like a robot controlled by his parents.

Only when he was sent to study abroad he started to get friends.

But even there he didn't have life of his own. He was just a man put on a rail and forced to go ahead. When you can't do what you like, your life becomes dull and tedious. And in Chi Jihoon's life there were too many restrictions.

However, once when he got free time he started playing Royal Road and discovered another himself.

In that distant world there was a river.

He liked to watch its leisure and dignified flow, so he became a fisherman.

He was not interested in fish at all, he was just enjoying the stay and feeling like he is actually living.

Other players were struggling trying to raise their levels, chasing items, but he was just fishing.

With time Choi Jihoon reached 3rd Master level in Fishing. He became the best fisherman of Royal Road.

But he didn't care about it. He was just fishing.

Because of how silent he was, other players thought he was a gloomy and melancholic fisherman and tried not to bother him much.

But Choi Jihoon was indifferent about what others think about him. He just liked fishing, the flowing water was taking away all his worries.

And then a certain man appeared.

In an effort to raise his Fishing skill level as fast as possible he occupied Chi Jihooh's favourite place. This man was measuring everything by its monetary value. He was spending every day in an endless struggle for survival.

His name was Weed.

Choi Jihoon several times saw that guy laughing excitedly during fishing. He did it even in the most insignificant and rare cases, for example when he was finding a copper coin in a fish's stomach.

Weed was genuinely happy about such trifles.

Competing in fishing with him was fun. And at some point Choi Jihoon was completely absorbed by it. To the extent where every time he caught a fish his hands were trembling from excitement.

He couldn't remember last time he felt something like this.

Choi Jihoon liked Weed.

Ever since then he tried to stay by his side.

In Fort Odein he participated in the battle besides him, in the Basra dungeon he hunted in the one party with him. When he heard that Weed was going to hunt with Hwaryeong he quickly found her and bribed The leader of her party to let him join.

"I've got to go. Don't look for me for a while, I'll be very busy."

Choi Jihoon got up and left the nightclub. On the street he was met by fresh night air.

He knew a place more enjoyable than any, even most expensive club.

The Royal Road.

The place overflowing with life was awaiting Zephyr.

*

●

- Language out of this world.
-
- A repetition of meaningless clamor.
-
- Say what you want to say.
- That won't mean i'll listen.

The voice of the singer sounded like sobbing. Sometimes pained, sometimes sweet. Accompanied by quiet sounds of piano, the girl was singing with a dreamy expression.

-
- Certain gestures are forbidden.
-
- Dialogues are almost non existent.
-
- Eyes connected simply
-
- then they told me
-
- Desperation. Anxiousness. Sadness. Anger. Disappointing aspirations. Affection. Love.
-
- Feelings expressed through your eyes.

We choose what we eat.

Delicious meal. Then tell me with your eyes the next place you want to go.

Face me and look into my eyes, let me read your mind.

A world without misunderstandings and distortion.

With your eyes, I can understand you better even without your effort.

We can never truly understand each other's thoughts.

You cannot understand the basis of my actions, I accept that.

Because I may not even know.

What we see with our eyes are inaccurate and vague.

I'm not impressed with words. Please illuminate happiness.

Just as I look in your eyes.

Even for just a short while, don't divert your eyes from my face.

One glance, one heart.

So illuminate your heart.

Unless you have hard palpitating words,

And glances, then I'd have to say.

Eyes and voices heard through the ear

Enter and dig deeper into your heart.

With words alone, you cannot convey your feelings.

Speak to me with your eyes.

I love seeing your eyes.

Jeon Hyo Lynn was singing her debut song "Dialogue of eyes" on the Times Square.

The audience was listening, breathless.

It seemed like her tender and affectionate eyes were singing along with her. Listening to her mysterious and dreamlike song, people felt like they were in paradise. And in front of them a bright and beautiful angel was performing.

But it wasn't just song that was fascinating the audience.

When Jeong Hyo Lynn was only starting to sing, she became known as a

singer with a magnificent voice, but gradually she started to demonstrate her other talents.

The song wouldn't be complete without her dance. Her every move, every expression were bringing audience to such delight, that they were heartily cheering for her.

Jeong Hyo Lynn was graciously moving around the stage, as if telling everyone that she is a fairy born for music.

And that's what she was called by all the media.

After finishing her international tour show the 'Fairy of the stage' has logged into Royal Road.

'From now on I'll be rising my level. And I'll try the new dance for sure.'

In Royal Road she chose the profession of a dancer. Though she could become a great bard with such a wonderful voice, but she wanted to dance too much.

'I want adventures, not just stand and sing. I want to try how it feels - beating monsters.'

To other people she looked like a graceful and innocent fairy. While actually she grew up as the oldest of 5 siblings in her family. She often behaved defiantly, like a tomboy.

Of course bards could hunt as well. But the dancer profession was still giving her more opportunities to participate in actual combat. Moreover, she could dance in different styles, so no one would recognize her moves, but in case of singing that would be impossible.

Thus, she became a dancer and started her adventure in Royal Road!

Fortunately, no one recognized her. She tried not to give herself out, and even made her character look slightly worse, than in reality.

*

"Let's go on a journey too?!"

"That's right. We only hunt here, it's getting boring."

“Not to mention the pyramid construction.”

Zephyr, Hwaryeong, Mapan, Pale, Surka, Romune, Iren and Mayron had gathered together.

They had all kinds of professions, some of them weren't very popular in the game. There weren't any real warriors or paladins, specialized in fighting monsters, among them. But their rare profession allowed them to find different ways to get out of tight situations.

Zephyr, with his high health, and monk Surka were responsible for close combat. In the dangerous cases when monsters were attacking in large crowds, Hwaryeong was putting them to sleep with a dance. Also she was boosting the party's attributes with her dances.

Pale and Mayron were shooting their bows from afar, besides them was Romune, who was casting destructive spells. Priestess Irene was providing support and healing to all party members.

Even merchant Mapan had his job. As a second professional skill he got the 'Touch of Luck' skill, that was increasing loot, left by monsters.

“So, where will we go?” - Pale asked everyone.

Surprisingly, the answer came from Irene, who was considered the most quiet in the party.

“Let's go to the Lake of Souls!”

“Isn't it a bit too hard for us?”

They learned about this place by accident.

Pale's father discovered it personally during his journey around the world of Royal Road.

“Oh, what a great view! Gotta check the water!”

Pale's father decided to interrupt his journey and take a swim. In such a spectacular canyon with a river, a real korean will never pass up an opportunity to at least take off his shoes and dip his feet into the water.

And then, while swimming, he noticed a path, leading to a lake. And of

course he told Pale about it after returning.

Though at that time the average level of Pale's party was 130, and considering the area, where his father was swimming, was inhabited by dangerous monsters, they would have hastily retreat after the first battle, leaving the bodies behind.

Therefore they still had no idea what kind of quests, treasures and dangers await them at the lake.

"We'll be fine. We're a lot stronger now."

"Well, that may be true..."

"Let's give it a try!"

Anticipating new experiences, they all voted as one to go to the lake. Having learned from Weed to always be well prepared to all the possible difficulties, they bought the supply of food, medicinal herbs, checked their equipment and were off on their way.

*

Lee Hayan couldn't believe it.

An ottice from Korea University arrived, that stated that Lee Hyun has passed the first round. Of course, it was only the first round, there was an interview ahead of him, but half the way was already behind.

"Oh, it's so great!"

She was staring at the notice, pleased.

She could earn her own university funds by part-time job and scholarship. But what about her brother...

Lee Hayan was afraid to talk about it with her brother. She was going to do it many times, but couldn't gather the courage. What if her brother will say, that it's a waste of money and won't even go to the interview? In his case it was entirely possible...

Chapter 8: Orc Wars

“Chwiik!”

After turning into an Orc, Weed had been thinking a lot.

‘What should I do to befriend them?’

Since he was used to thinking like a human, finding a way to approach to a completely alien race was turning into a hard task for him.

Weed had already got used to communicating with the Orcs, but he was still unable to gain any real friends among them. Then he decided that it was time to stop avoiding his new kin and start to take them for what they are. To treat them as if they were humans and his real comrades.

At first, he thought that it would be extremely hard. But after dealing with them some more, he realized: ‘Oh, it’s so... familiar.’

Weed quickly befriended everyone in his party.

Orcs! They weren’t that different from the Geomchis. Harsh! Aggressive! Violent: If something was not to their liking, they were immediately pulling out their weapons! Reckless: they were attacking even the stronger opponents without a second thought! Their fists acted faster than their words, about 3-4 times faster.

“Catch, this is for ya. Chwiik!”

Weed cooked the food and handed it out to everyone in his party. Orcs were so indiscriminating and insatiable that they liked absolutely everything.

But even after accepting them for what they were, Weed still had problems blending in with this new environment. Same as humans, their society also had their own rules and hierarchy.

Regular Orcs, Orc warriors and scouts were at the lowest level of social ladder in Yurokin mountains. They had greatest numbers, but were just subordinates to other Orcs.

Commanding them were Orc champions, captains, elders and chieftains.

Captains were commanding groups of about hundred Orcs each. Elders ruled villages. Chieftains ruled and monitored domains consisting of several settlements.

And Weed was really hated by everyone above him at the command chain.

“Karichwi wasn’t born in our village. Chwiik!”

They were questioning his origins.

“He eats less, than we do. Cwik!”

Comparing appetites.

“Karichwi is too good looking. Cwiiit!”

Envied his appearance.

“Chwichwik! Females should be protected!”

After all, all the problems were because of the women!

Orcs were jealous and envious of Weed because of female attention.

“Ah, chwi! Even after I became an Orc, chwiik! The world won’t just leave me alone!”

Weed moaned. Because of all these constant challenges thrown at him by the gods, one would consider hanging himself!

‘Really, handsome guys are envied everywhere.’

He decided that the problem is in the fearful appearance, which he thoughtlessly sculptured, while being a human. And the only way to fix everything would be to start completely ignoring attention of the surrounding females.

As a result, they got angry at him as well.

“Chwiik! I don’t like those females. All of you, just take them away. Chwiik!”

And after he proclaimed that, females got even more offended.

“Chwik. He’s too full of himself.”

“Insolent bastard! Chwichwit!”

“Let’s banish him from the village! Chwiik!”

Angry locals took a long time to settle down.

And while many in the settlement didn’t like Weed, there were quite a few regular Orcs who acknowledged him.

“He’s from the winners caste! Chwiiiit! This Orc deserves respect. Chwiik!”

“Chwichichiiiit! Good fighter!”

“Cunning, chwiik. He would survive anywhere.”

Weed often fought and went to hunt. By order of the village elder, for the sake of peace and development of the village, every morning a hunting party was formed and of course Weed was always present.

“Cwiik!”

It usually consisted of Orc warriors and ordinary Orcs. Usually they fought against huge Minotaurs! Monsters around level 300.

Weed tightened his grip on the glaive.

‘Precious experience points!’

Minotaurs dual wielded blood-red axes and had more HP, Strength and Dexterity, compared to other monsters of the same level. So there were few people in the game who hunted them. Besides, they usually lived in places where players were rare.

But Weed loved to fight against monsters of all sorts.

Like a merchant appreciates every customers, he also happily greeted any monster.

Experience points - additional power!

Items - pure income!

With growing strength, rewards increased; and with additional loot, his future income also increased.

Weed was thinking using his own values and concepts.

“Moo! Dirty Orcs!”

Minotaur wasn't even slightly afraid of his opponents.

Regular Orcs were level 120 and Orc-warriors 210. And all of them were terrified by the ferocity coming from the enemy.

“Moo! Kill you all!”

Minotaur started to gain speed. He charged, swinging two huge axes. The Orcs in front of him didn't seem like worthy opponents.

“Chwii-i-ik!”

Weed jumped forward. His enormous body flew for about 10 meters and landed right next to the Minotaur.

“Chwiik! I'm your opponent!”

After turning into an Orc, his Wisdom and Intelligence got reduced, but Strength and Dexterity were boosted considerably. That's why he started to use regular attack instead of techniques that consumed loads of mana, which he was now short on.

“Chwi-i-ik!”

Minotaur hit with an axe what seemed to be a minor obstacle, but Weed deflected it with his glaive. A loud ringing echoed around from collided weapons.

Opponents stood in front of each other.

Sword and glaive are somewhat similar, but there are also a lot of differences. Glaive is wider and heavier, so it takes some time to get used to wielding it normally. In general, it is a slower, but destructive weapon.

Ding! Ka-Clang!

Each time glaive collided with monster's axe, there was ringing and sparks. With each hit deflected by glaive, Minotaur was forced to step back, and it was enraging him.

Normally, such a rusted glaive would've shattered a long time ago. But

Weed had repaired, grinded and polished it to extreme sharpness.

Weed's strong resistance gave strength to his fellow Orcs.

“Chwiiiik!”

Minotaur finally grew frightened.

The wave of Orcs advanced fast! Hundreds of Orcs with glaives in hands run up and began to slash at the monster. Some of them died from Minotaur's attacks, but in return he also received many wounds from which he finally died.

As it is said, “you can not block ten hands with a single one”. In that exact manner Orcs were winning the battles, due to their numerical advantage.

And the real hunt began.

Hundreds of Orcs with glaives hunted huge monsters. While many of them got killed, the rest grew stronger. Because survivors gained new levels, the overall strength of the party kept growing.

Orcs survived despite being constantly threatened by many dangerous monsters. They survived thanks to their fertility. Some Orcs died, but others grew stronger, and to their aid came new growing up tribesmen!

Even knowing all this, Weed made sure that none of his friends died. He repaired their weapons, prepared food and bandaged them when it was necessary.

The big hunt continued!

Many simple-minded, ignorant Orcs roamed the surrounding lands slaying any monsters they met. Orc didn't possess any special techniques or other secrets, they just overwhelmed their enemy with the sheer numbers. If a dozen wasn't enough, then a hundred will come; and even if they die, even more will follow.

In such dangerous battles, many Orcs started to gather around Weed.

“Chwichwit, ignorant Karichwi, lead us.”

“Karichwi, you are simple, we are comfortable with ya. Chwiik!”

Because of his low Intelligence and Wisdom, Orcs regarded Weed as one of them! In addition he also had high Leadership and Charisma stats, due to which Orcs were willing to be led by him.

Nodding to the “recruits” in agreement, Weed continued the hunt.

Although he received command of the new “heads”, fighting became harder because of them. Because they were all one big group, the one to last hit the enemy, received over half the XP.

The rest of experience was distributed almost equally, regardless of your contribution to the battle. And Weed had to restrain his greed for experience points.

‘I have to stay smarter than these greedy Orcs...’

If he focuses on getting the maximum amount of experience, He would risk losing all the friendship with these Orcs. At the same time, if he holds back, it may very well lead to his death at some point.

That’s why Weed just fought as much as possible. He attacked the monster first, did as much damage as he could and if there weren’t too many others fighting the same monster, aimed for the killing blow.

Not to mention that a large number of battles was the main point of Weed’s early game strategy. From the first day he attempted to boost his attributes as much as possible, and only then raise levels. As a result, fighting monsters of the same level was considerably easier.

By accumulating various skills and attributes, he became much more powerful than any other player of the same level! And with time, the difference continued increasing.

‘Hard work now will make it easier later on...’

He couldn’t count the times he had noticed players who do not pay attention to it. There have been cases when people reached level 250 without even getting their sword skill to an appropriate level. Those kind of players leveled up without improving their skills just because it would

have required some hard work.

But for Weed it became a priority. He was very glad that Orcs hunted a lot. Surrounding lands were filled with monsters, and all he did here was fighting them, putting trade skills and sculptural mastery aside for now.

At some point Weed reached 295th level.

Pale's party's hunt at the Soul Lake was in full swing.

Before, they would not have dared to approach this place, but now, after raising their levels and with the help of Hwaryeong, Zephyr and Meyron, they decided to give it a try.

Here they encountered terrible water spirits and fishlike monsters!

After fierce and lengthy battle most of the group left the game, and only Pale and Mayrun stayed for a date next to the lake.

Pale actually liked to chat:

“And so... Actually... And then...”

He met a girl that he really liked.

Pale wanted to tell her all about his life and adventures in the Royal Road. Especially since they met through this game.

He told her about the heavenly city Lavias.

“What? Really?”

Meyron's eyes sparkled when she heard about the first steps they took as beginners, their first quests and how they explored the city in the sky.

“How did Weed chose a profession of sculptor?”

“As far as I know...”

Pale also talked a lot about Weed. He also shared the secret that it was Weed who destroyed the vampires in the province of Mort.

There are many dangerous monsters preying on regular citizens in the surrounding countryside. Catch them with a hunting party and feed their meat to the young.

Difficulty: C.

Reward: Depending on the result - equipment, precious stones and ores.

Restrictions: Orc race only. Or those capable of shapeshifting into Orcs due to magic or other means.

Orc Chieftain and Elders were also giving missions, however, the Chieftain lived in a neighboring village, and the Elders weren't easy to get friendly with. But Weed didn't despair, and continued to hunt a lot and do quests. He didn't receive any good items for them, but rewarded ingredients and ores were rare.

Besides, hunting monsters awarded him with precious experience. Not just the XP points he received for kills, but also new knowledge and information. Most of the monsters in the Lands of Despair were over level 300 and often possessed unique abilities. It was very easy to make a fatal mistake in the first encounter.

Alongside with the Orcs, Weed was fighting against various monsters. Sometimes even faced Dark Elves. Even though they were small, they kept using elemental magic and proved to be worthy opponents. But it didn't stop Weed from defeating them and gaining even more respect inside Orcs village.

This way Weed explored most of the Yuroki mountain range.

To his surprise, the Dark Elves fortress looked as menacing as the Citadel of Seraburg in Rosenheim Kingdom. And with all the magical weapons installed into the walls, the fortress became virtually impregnable.

"We'll capture it! Break through! Nothing shall stop us! Chwiik!"

Elder looked at Weed with warmth.

This huge Orc was able to gather the meat of the most dangerous predators and complete his task. As a reward he received a lot of ore suitable for forging high quality weapons.

Old Orc closed his eyes.

"Chwik. When I look at you, I remember my youth."

“Thank you, Elder. Chwiik! - answered Weed with respect.

Usually Orcs talk among themselves very crudely, and Weed tried to adhere to these rules. But to every rule there is always an exception, and here it was the Elder, the first influential Orc to support him. He helped Weed to buy a house, gave him advice and of course various quests.

Only the most famous and powerful Orcs, who managed to live to a ripe old age, became Elders. And although they already lacked strength, they still retained their influence and knowledge, allowing them to supervise young Orc captains.

“Chwiik! Now I’ll tell you about our mountains...”

Elder had already told Weed many interesting things in the past. About Yuroki mountain range. About all kinds of monsters, their skills, abilities and where they lived!

Sometimes his speeches dragged on for so long, that he wanted to yawn, but Weed carefully listened to it all. Most of the time elder kept to the relevant information and some of those stories were really incredible.

Weed eagerly absorbed all the new information.

“Dark Elves - are our enemies. Recently they’ve started to do strange things. Chwilit!”

“What strange things? Chwichik!”

Elder wrinkled in discontent.

“Chwiiik! Karichwi, you know that they, like people, have built a fortress.”

“Chwichwit. So what?”

“The walls are very high and thick. Chwhik! Monsters can no longer get close to Dark Elves and keep attacking us instead. Chwiik!”

Elder was very sad because of current situation. More and more monsters came to the borders of the village, and they were becoming more powerful each day.

For Weed, on the other hand, it was good news. More monsters means harder battles and above all, more XP!

“Chwichwik! And we don’t like having that huge fortress above our village. We decided to attack the Dark Elves. 25 chieftains from neighboring lands support this idea. Cwiik. We are getting ready to attack. When sky turns bright and then dark 10 times, we will attack Dark Elves fortress. Karichwi. Come with us!”

Ding!

New quest: The prosperity of Orc tribes.

From long time ago, Yuroki mountains were dominated by the Orcs. But now the Dark Elves decided to challenge their position. With their magic, marksmanship and alliance with the dark creatures they’ve become a serious threat to Orcs’ future.

Difficulty: Race quest.

Reward: Depending on the result - precious stones and ores.

Restrictions: Orc race only. Or those capable of shapeshifting into Orcs due to magic or other means.

War between Orcs and Dark Elves!

It will decide who will rule in the Lands of Despair.

With that said, Weed being so focused on the hunt, experienced a shred of regret.

‘I was hunting so well, gaining levels and items...’

Soon the whole mountain range of Yuroki will host the final battle. Although Weed was indignant inside, he kept a calm facade for the benefit of the elder.

Seeing this, the old Orc continued:

“Karichwi! If you are a brave Orc, chwichichik! You must take part in this battle!”.

Do you accept the Quest? If refused, you might get exiled from this Orc village.

“Yes. Chwiik! I will fight those dark bastards.”.

You’ve accepted the Quest

Before the battle between the two races Weed canceled the Sculptural

transformation and came down from the mountains. He was expected by warriors and priests of Freyja.

“Captain, you're back!” - Exclaimed happily Hosram.

“Yes. And how are you, hungry?”

“If only a little.” - answered Buren.

Weed had been regularly gathering, taking or buying food from the Orc village and giving it to the hungry soldiers.

‘Oh, they are like leeches.’

Weed certainly didn't have any parental feelings of wanting to find food for their “children”. He just wanted to spend as little as possible on all these slacking off soldiers, or as he called them in his mind, pigs.

‘They sleep, eat, and don't even do anything productive!’

But Weed kept displaying his friendly smile.

“Then I'll feed you soon. I just got wild boar meat, just have to cook it now.”

In his travels through the mountains, he not only hunted monsters. but also regular animals. In the last campaign he managed to catch a whole family of wild boars.

“Wow! Thank you, Commander!”

As soon as they saw meat, the eyes of surrounding soldiers shined. Using a variety of spices and seasonings, Weed perfectly fried it. Also, for the first time since that drinking party with Geomchis long time ago, he opened some of the tinctures from his stock.

“Eat and drink to your hearts' content.”

“Thank you. Yummy!”

Warriors consumed this extremely delicious dish with great pleasure. But the royal knights constantly grumbled.

“Oh, I haven't eaten meat in a long time.”

“They served it every day inside the palace.”

“This proves to be pretty good.”

“Well, there’s a bit too much garlic and onions.”

While warriors, knights and priests ate, Weed took care of their equipment.

“Armor repaired, weapons sharpened, clothes ironed!”

He carefully examined all the equipment and finished just before dinner ended.

“Everyone, get ready for the battle!” - Addressed them Weed.

“Yes!” - shouted the soldiers.

“To battle? Well, we’ll get ready then.” - Answered the knights.

Priests blessed all of the gathered warriors. Knights boosted this effect even more with their prayers.

Weed shouted:

“Calling the Death Knight!”

“Sir, you called?”

Answering with a nod, Weed sighing heavily, finally took off the tiresome Crimson Necklace of Life and took out from his bag and equipped the Black Necklace of Life with a level 400 Vampire Lord Tori, trapped inside.

“Phew...”

Weed still couldn’t bring himself to activate the necklace. Not that he didn't trust knights and priests, but in the following battle all their lives will be put on the line.

“I summon the Vampire Lord!”

Immediately after his cry, a scarlet light blossomed in the middle of the black stone. As if someone dropped there a drop of blood. And then in a flash of darkness he appeared. A tall, slender man in dark cloak and with

pale skin.

Vampire Lord Tori smiled.

“Ooh, it’s been a long time since I saw this beautiful world. Is this sunlight?”

Vampire’s fangs grew and flashed. His blood-red eyes looked with interest at the people gathered in front of him.

Tori radiated such power and authority, that the feet of the soldiers started to tremble.

Coming out of nowhere black clouds covered the sun. The ground got covered by cold fog.

Weed exchanged glances with Death Knight and turned toward the Vampire Lord.

He couldn’t afford to suffer the same losses as the last time. Tori had an incredible abilities: transforming his enemies into stone, turning into a bat and moving with lightning speed. But the worst of it was his vampirism.

By draining his victims, Lord could restore his health and mana as many times as he needed, therefore they had to finish this as quickly as possible.

‘Both Death Knight and me got a lot stronger. We need to exhaust him together as much as possible and then finish with the help of Priests magic. No matter how strong a Vampire he is, he won’t be able to handle this...’

Yes, they were faced with a formidable level 400 opponent, but these warriors weren’t normal either. Sharpened swords, polished armor, bonuses from food and sacred blessings.

Besides it was the daytime. And they were outside of a dungeon!

Boss battles are usually hard because they are boosted by half inside their lairs.

Three hundred paladins and a hundred priests.

Last time Tori killed most of the warriors, but now, during the day, he

would have difficulty unleashing his full power. Even though he covered sky with the clouds, part of his abilities only got boosted during the night.

As a precaution, Weed also prepared his trump card - the Sculpture Destruction. He intentionally summoned Vampire not far from his Mercenary sculpture.

‘I would like to avoid using that ability...’

But Tori didn’t move and quietly stood there.

“O-o-oh!”

Vampire Lord noticed Seoyoon’s statue in mercenary clothes.

“B-Beautiful! Is this really a sculpture? Even if the most beautiful girl in the world were to be turned into stone, it wouldn’t compare with this.”

“...”

The Menacing Vampire fell in love with Seoyoon.

“Art! Art! Art! It’s power makes this boring eternal life more dynamic. Children of the Night love art. It’s because of this passion I’ve settled in the old castle. All art in the world belongs to me! You wouldn’t take it from me. I, Lord Tori, the greatest heir to the true blood, will punish you, puny humans.”

Finally, the battle with Vampire Lord began!

Weed and Death Knight both rushed at the Vampire.

“Blessing! Sculpting blade!”

Protective blessing of the High Priest’s ring activated immediately.

Weed dispelled Orc transformation even before entering the camp, so he already had enough mana to use all his skills.

Usually he would be aggressively attacking his enemy, dealing multiple wounds. But now Weed acted differently.

He gathered all his strength for a single powerful attack!

Simple, but at the same time very dangerous tactic: betting everything on

this single strike, he's bound to lose rhythm and open himself for a counterattack.

But Weed still decided to do it.

"Sword Kaiser!"

His most powerful technique. He has used up all his mana on this single attack.

Cold sword pierced Lord Tori's chest. The wound and surrounding it flesh started to quickly freeze under the effects of this sword.

This new sword lacked blessing compared to his last one, but it had higher Attack Rating and was freezing it's victims.

Weaker monsters would just freeze to death, and even if they survived, their speed would be greatly reduced.

After taking this hit, Vampire's health dropped by 30%. Vampire just started to recover when another attack hit him.

"Deadly blade!"

Death Knight's sword penetrated Tori's side. At the same time, Weed pulled out his sword and jumped back.

"A-a-a-a! I'll suck your blood dry right now!"

Vampire got very angry, and his eyes seemed to fill with blood even more.

"Blade Whirl!"

Tori's blood drops along with sharp as blades gusts of wind flew in all directions. But Weed was ready for something like that.

All the warriors have already retreated to the safe distance even before the fight began, and this attack didn't even reach them. While both Weed and Death Knight charged into the middle. The eye of the storm is often the safest!

Having avoided this spell, they continued to attack their enemy. They circled Tori while using their strongest attacks.

Vampire's health kept dropping quickly.

Priests weren't resting either.

As soon as Whirl stopped, all the priest raised their hands in spellcasting: "Healing hand!"

Vampire Lord's body was enveloped by bright light.

Normally, people would be healed by holy magic, but on undead species, which Vampire certainly belonged to, it had the opposite effect.

During the first minute of battle Tori's health already dropped by half, and he was forced to use his trump ability. Vampirism!

He was unable to drink Death Knight's blood, therefore his aim was on Weed who kept circling around. But each time Tori tried to grab him, Weed kept slipping through his fingers.

Priests kept constantly using their spells and situation for Tori was quickly turning for the worse.

"I... I need a victim... Thirsty, blood, health!"

Realizing that if he doesn't do something quick, his life will soon end, Tori rushed toward the royal knights and soldiers who protected priests.

"A-a-a-ah!"

Terrified, Soldiers scattered in all directions, but one still fell into Tori's hands. His eye got filled with despair.

"B... Blood!"

Tori sunk his teeth into the neck of his victim. This weak soldier, of course, was hardly enough to sate the Vampire, but still helped to restore some of his health and mana.

But while he drank blood, priests continued using their spells on him, as a result, his health not only didn't increase, but actually dropped slightly. At that moment Weed jumped behind Tori, dealing final blow and ending his life.

Lord Tori burst into dust while terrified soldier fell to the ground.

Thanks to the priests healing him all this time, he actually survived with just a serious scare.

After this fight Weed started summoning Lord Tori each time he returned to the camp. While those victories he didn't receive any XP points, he still could practice his sword skills while fighting a powerful opponent.

The only one who didn't enjoy these battles was the Death Knight. Not long ago he went through something very similar and secretly pitied the fearsome Vampire.

Every day for a week Weed continued summoning Tori for a new battle. Each time Vampire felt more and more depressed. In the end, he bowed his head.

“You have the right to give me, the heir to a famous family, your orders. Knowing about your talents in art and leadership, I'll entrust myself into your hands.”

And then Tori gave Weed a drop of his blood.

Vampire blood! When drinking their victims, vampire could give some of their blood to turn one into his servant. However, this time Tori gave away his blood for an oath.

A Blood oath.

Special item: You've received Vampire's blood.

- When it's used, Mana increased by 300: a onetime bonus for your profession.
- Other statistics can both increase and decrease by a random value.
- Charm +20
- Charisma +10
- Black Magic skill +2%
- Faith -50

Unique items that increased mana pool were extremely rare in this game.

From that time on, Weed could summon Lord Tori at any time. It was

going to be very useful, considering Orcs finally finished their preparations for the upcoming battle with Dark Elves.

Chapter 9: Hall of Fame

Since early morning Lee Hyun was very excited.

Unexpectedly for him, the creator of Royal Road, Unicorn Corporation sent him an e-mail!

“We would like you to visit us.”

The message was sent by one of the heads of Public Relations Department, Mr. Chang Yoon Soo. But there was just one day left before the upcoming battle between Orcs and Dark Elves.

“Right when I’m tight on time... But i guess i have to go.”

Lee Hyun didn’t want to reveal his real name, but this time he was contacted by representative of Unicorn, so he didn’t think much.

For the past 50 years Unicorn has been making some of the most popular games in the world. Almost always they were receiving huge profits, not just from monthly game subscriptions, but from sales of comics, cartoons, movies and even an amusement park that featured recognizable game characters.

There was even a rumor that Unicorn has the largest amount of free cash in the country.

However, their business didn’t always go that smoothly, Unicorn Corporation survived through multiple crises and huge competition from other game developers. A few years ago, the game Continent of Magic lured away a great chunk of their audience.

The number of players dropped dramatically and gone along with them, money. If they didn’t do something extraordinary, they’d have to reduce the staff and stay at the background of the game industry for a long time.

And they did, creating the most innovative game in history - Royal Road. They changed the very concept of virtual reality and regained their lost position. And even more that that - they started to earn more money than ever before!

“What do they want from me..? I don’t think i broke any rules. I’ll have to make that visit.”

Lee Hyun washed his face and went to the laundry to rent clean clothes. He was working there at some point in the past, so he quickly agreed on the stuff, paid for clothes, redressed and headed to Unicorn Corporation.

To reach their main office he had to take the subway and then a few busses. It was a very long and complicated trip, but aside from that, a costly one which irritated Lee Hyun the most.

“I’ll spend at least 3000 won just getting there.”

Lee Hyun was very worried.

Nothing in his life was easy so far!

When he by an incredible twist of fate managed to sell his Continent of Magic account, the money was taken from him the next day. And all those hardships he went through just to become a sculptor in the end! Not to mention his constant troubles with the sales of good items.

“I hope I’m not going there just to receive some souvenir and be sent home. They can’t do that. They shouldn’t...”

The event for players! Anything can happen there.

Lee Hyun left the bus. The street where the main office of Unicorn was located was occupied only by huge skyscrapers. Even at first glance everything looked expensive. The road was filled with shiny imported cars and all the people were wearing expensive suits.

And in this environment the building of Unicorn Corporation stood out the most. It was 4-5 times bigger than all the other buildings, and the small square in front of the building was filled with foreigners sitting on beautiful ornamented benches and talking merrily.

There were also many journalists that came to cover even the most insignificant events of Unicorn Corporation.

Among all these people Lee Hyun was a black sheep in his clean, but simple clothes. That was a bit unnerving, so without any delay he walked

to the entrance at a quick pace.

However, as soon as he approached tall glass doors, he was stopped by guards.

“Excuse me, what business do you have here? For security reasons we don’t let in people without permit.”

“I’ve been invited by Mr. Chang Yoon Soo, he’s the chief of some section in the Department of Public Relations. My name is Lee Hyun.”

“Wait a moment. I’ll check.”

Though guards looked like overly muscular thugs, they were very polite with Lee Hyun.

‘I guess there’s a reason for that...’

While Lee Hyun was waiting, he heard some muttering behind him. He was very worried that he wouldn’t be allowed to enter and the money he spent on the trip would be lost in vain.

However, the guard quickly returned.

“We checked with Mr. Chang Yoon Soo. He didn’t think you would be able to come so quickly, so he didn’t have time to warn us. We apologize.”

“Ah, that’s ok.”

“The Public Relations Department is located on 43rd floor. We hope you enjoy your visit.”

Lee Hyun entered the building and took the elevator to the 43rd floor. All the way there he was worried that he would just be presented with some souvenir. That was a stupid worry. Such an important person wouldn’t bother to invite him for such little things.

The Public Relations Department was upholding the image of the corporation in peoples’ consciousness. It was separated in sections and Chang Yoon Soo was leading one of them. The Medium to Long Term Advertisement Section was considered one of the most important sections in the whole company.

“You arrived at floor 43. Public Relations Department. Have a nice time.”
- said female voice from a loudspeaker.

The elevator stopped and the doors opened.

“Welcome. My name is Chang Yoon Soo.”

He was met by the section chief and a few subordinates. Chang Yoon Soo led Lee Hyun to a quiet consultation room. There the secretary who was serving coffee asked Lee Hyun if he would like something to drink and he replied firmly.

“Honey water please.”

“Eh, we don’t have something like that...”

“Well, then ginseng tea.”

To replenish energy and maintain good health one should only use healthy food. Even if you do sports, if you don’t eat properly, your health will suffer.

Fortunately they had ginseng tea, so a little while later they received tea and cookies and began to talk.

Chang Yoon Soo was behaving like an open and friendly person. He briefly spoke about Unicorn Corporation and his department’s aims. He used many technical terms, so Lee Hyun didn’t understand much.

‘I don’t have to know all that anyway...’ – Lee Hyun thought, calming himself.

Usually in such conversations the one who knows more is first to get tired, and the ignorant one can sit back and relax. He just has to wait until the other party reveals their purpose to see possible benefits.

‘Looks like they’re not going to give me any souvenirs. So what do they want from me?’

Finally Chang Yoon Soo noticed that Lee Hyun wasn’t interested and moved to the main point.

“As you know, our company is featuring the recordings of the best

players' adventures on our website.”

Of course Lee Hyun knew that, he even watched them a few times.

The Hall of Fame was one of the main sections of their website. It hosted records of battles and adventures of the best players of Royal Road. Being in there was considered a great honor.

“Many players want to get into Hall of Fame, but the actual number is strictly limited by the company's rules. The more players there are, the more dispersed the audience will be. So our rules only allow players with Fame of 6000 or more to be featured there.”

“That means I pass?”

“Right. So, do you agree to show your game records in the Hall of Fame? You will have to provide a record of your quest or battle once a week. That's all.”

That was an unexpected offer.

The Hall of Fame was limited to the top 500 players, one of them being Bad Ray with the highest level in the game.

But Lee Hyun wasn't interested in it.

“I'm not looking for fame. And I wouldn't like it if people started to recognize me in Royal Road.”

“Really?”

Chang Yoon Soo's eyes widened. That response was completely unexpected for him. Fame is one of the main desires of people! Even the main goal of Royal Road was to become an emperor and unite the continent!

So a player who refused to become famous was a mystery for him.

“You are, a very unusual person...” - said Chang Yoon Soo with admiration.

“Until now I have only met two types of players. First, those that wish to receive the reward corresponding to their abilities. Second, those that beg

for it. The competition among the 500 players is huge and they try to improve their position by any means. But you're the first one I can't place into any category."

Lee Hyun was listening in silence.

'Damn, I just spent money in vain...'

He was overwhelmed with regret.

But Chang Yoon Soo continued.

"In fact, when you're featured in Hall of Fame besides the fame itself you get a small bonus. We pay small fees for advertising Royal Road. Depending on the popularity of your videos the fee may be changed, but on average it's a few million won a month."

"You said few million won?"

"Yeah. That's what most players get. As you know there are a huge number of people playing Royal Road and the Hall of Fame is pretty popular. For your advertisements of the game we pay you money. Compared to the amount associated with mass media, the money can only be called chump change."

"..."

Chang Yoon Soo continued to persuade Lee Hyun.

"This is your chance to become famous! Once you become popular in Hall of Fame you will get attention of media and they will fight for the right to talk with you. And then you will be able to demand the decent reward for interview."

At the beginning of the game most broadcasting companies were relying on broadcasting the adventures of high-level players. But the audience quickly became bored by it. Players with highest levels were spending all their time on hunting and raising levels. Few of them were able to provide a decent show that would be interesting to watch.

Then broadcasting companies changed their strategy and started inviting only outstanding players who managed to achieve something

significant. And most of the candidates were picked from Hall of Fame.

“Our corporation is actively supporting this trend. We created the Hall of Fame to discover the real heroes. And now i met a player who doesn’t need all that and who just wants to enjoy the game. Lee Hyun, I want to say that you’re an amazing person.”

“ ... ”

Lee Hyun looked around.

All the assistants in the conference room were looking at him with admiration.

“He refused money and fame like it was nothing...”

“What a man!”

“He will never be slave to money.”

So they whispered to each other.

Lee Hyun took Chang Yoon Soo’s hand and paying no attention to the surprised looks said: “Could you place me right to the top of the Hall of Fame?”

After the unusual visitor departed, the conference room stayed silent.

Chang Yoon Soo was looking at the empty mug of ginseng tea and thinking.

“So his name is Lee Hyun...”

“What’s wrong sir?” - asked the approaching assistant.

“Just can’t get this man out of my mind.”

So Junhee was working in this department for a long time and thought that she knew her boss well enough. But right now she couldn’t understand him.

Chang Yoon Soo was the main person behind Royal Road’s advertising strategy. It was because of his hard work that the game became so

popular.

The slogan 'The game where you can become an emperor!' was created by Chang Yoon Soo, and it had a great impact on the company's development.

And now was the first time she saw him lost in thoughts after meeting with an ordinary person.

"That's not like you. This is the first time you paid so much attention to an ordinary player."

"Me? Of course I would."

Chang Yoon Soo shook his head and handed her a document.

"Read it and you'll understand."

So Junhee read the document with great care. It was a file on Lee Hyun.

Royal Road was proud of its security system. Even the top managers of Unicorn Corporation weren't able to see players' level, profession, skills and items.

In Lee Hyun's file there was just a single line. Black letters on the white sheet of paper stating only one thing - the date he started to play. Lee Hyun registered in Royal Road exactly 9 month ago.

"I can't believe it! Not even a year since he registered?!" - exclaimed So Junhee in shock.

All the employees of the department were looking at them with interest.

"I didn't believe it too until I met him. It turns out in just 9 months he managed to get enough Fame points to get in top 500..."

"I can't believe it..."

"Most probably in these 9 months all he did was play Royal Road." - said Chang Yoon Soo quietly.

These words made So junhee angry.

She was playing Royal Road since its release. Every evening after work. She was paid pretty well, so she could allow herself to buy good items

from auctions. Still, after all that time her Fame barely got over 2500. With the combat profession of Wizard, she constantly hunted or did quests.

“Fame, even if you work hard, there’s no telling if you will obtain it.”

“Exactly.”

“Some even abandoned their beauty just to burn the midnight oil...”

“That’s why it will be interesting.”

“What?”

“I can’t wait for his profession or quest. The video will probably be released after a week, we will know then.”

Chang Yoon Soo stretched his hands and laughed with relief.

“It was worthwhile choosing this job. It’s been a really long time since something worth my interest appeared.”

Like the Orc Elder said, 10 suns and 10 moons passed and on the next morning the day of the decisive battle arrived!

“Chwiik!”

“Chwiiik!”

“Chwichwik!”

Weed was looking at the Dark Elves’ fortress together with other Orcs.

“The morning is in the mountains. The red sun is rising, the mighty wind is blowing. Chwichwit. Heavy clouds are crawling across the sky, like if they know that the battle is near. In the battle against the Dark Elves I will be fighting in the front line! Chwik!”

With one foot set on the boulder and chest stuck out, Weed was reading his monologue!

“This sunny morning i feel hope. Chwichwik. Our courage and thirst for victory. Our noble spirit. Our souls. Chwiiik! I want to sing! Dark Elves are

strong, but we will fight with song in our hearts. With the song of victory. No one will escape and we will be victorious!”

Weed was setting an atmosphere by reading a monologue. If the video was going to appear in the Hall of Fame, it will be seen by multiple players. He should create a positive image.

But he was doing his speech from a body of an Orc with huge fangs and terrifying facial expression, so he couldn't make it seem deep and moving.

He wanted to read some poem in his monologue, but he didn't know any.

“Chwichwiiik! That's fate!”

Weed spat and returned to watching the fortress.

There was a brief rain last night and mountains were covered by thick mist. Sleepy, but already hungry birds were fluttering between sparse trees. Soon the sun will be shining at full power and the weather will improve. But for now it was still cold.

“A-aachoo! Chwiik!”

Even thick-skinned Orcs started to succumb to weather. Weed at least had a cape, which he tightly wrapped around himself, but other Orcs only had armor.

The temple of Necromancers was standing at the top of the mountain. The cliffs around it looked pretty steep and the only way to reach the gate was to pass through the Dark Elves settlement. But it was surrounded by 7-meter-high wall. Dark Elves were proficient in elemental magic and with its help they were able to quickly erect an impregnable fortress.

Moreover, at the base of the wall some kind of dark-blue smoke was swirling, which was definitely not something good. While watching the fortress, Weed saw a few times how some random birds carelessly flew into the smoke just to drop dead a moment later.

And as a finishing touch the walls were filled with Dark Elves holding their bows. They noticed Orcs a long time ago and were just waiting to see

what they were going to do. Were they to come closer, they would be immediately met with a barrage of Elven arrows.

‘To reach the Necromancers’ temple is one heck of a goal... How are we supposed to take this fortress?’

Besides Weed were his 20000 subordinate Orcs. But on the wall were no less than 10000 Dark Elves! Even though Orcs and Dark Elves had similar strength, in case of siege the advantage was clearly on the Dark Elves’ side.

“Karichwi, we believe in you. Chwiik!”

The Elder gave Weed a reassuring pat on the shoulder.

“I know. We will definitely win.”

“I trust you. Chwichwit. But let’s win today!”

“E-e-erm... It must definitely be today? Chwiik!”

“Yes. We have no food. Chwichwichwi.”

“ ... ”

Stupid Orcs! There were more than 20000 of them gathered, and not a single one of them bothered to bring any provisions.

‘We have no food and half the warriors got a cold...’

Weed wanted to just run away, but he couldn’t do it. All the Orcs were faithfully watching their new commander.

‘Damn it... This way I’ll die here.’

Many times during this quest Weed was walking the edge, but this time it looked like he would definitely fall. He didn’t see any way to get out of this situation.

‘If I’m going to die anyway, at least I’ll do it for a reason...’

Weed pulled himself together and looked around. He noticed something strange. Even though there was no wind, the trees behind them were rustling. After taking a closer look, Weed noticed a great number of Orcs coming out of the forest.

“Chwiik! Orcs from Chwibarr tribe arrived.”

The chieftain of Chwibarr brought another 10000 Orcs! And this was just the beginning. Wherever Weed looked, even in the far distance, the trees were shaking.

“Karichwi, I’ve brought 20000 warriors!”

“Holchwi tribe sent 15000!”

Weed was standing and with growing hope looked at the arriving reinforcements. The fortress of Dark Elves was located near the top of the mountain, and from every side more and more Orc troops were approaching. There were great many Orcs gathering in the Yuroki mountains today. Far too many.

“Chwiik! Chwit!”

Weed was involuntary making snorting sounds.

The Orc army looked like a huge tsunami. There were young and old Orcs, but most of them were battle-hardened veterans. And all of them came to fight besides him, leader of an army of 20000 Orcs!

“Baranchwi sent 8000. Chwichwichwit!”

“Gerbage sent 9000. Brought everyone!”

“Salchwi and his thousand fighters arrived!”

Messengers from every tribe were continuously bringing new messages.

Some of the arrived Orcs had already fought Dark Elves many times. This was evident from the burns and scars, left by Dark Elves’ magic and arrows.

The armies of the 25 closest chieftains were going to gather to storm the fortress. 5 tribes couldn’t come, but still the entire area around the Dark Elves settlement was filled with Orcs.

When the sun reached zenith the last tribe arrived, the number of Orcs reached over 400000.

The entire horde was behaving very loud, clanging with their armor and

weapons and shouting all kinds of insults at their opponents. Such a great number of Orcs at their walls was making the Dark Elves seriously worried. Now they didn't look as relaxed as this morning, a lot of them were preparing spells in advance and holding them ready to use.

The chieftain Bulchwi, who was standing nearby, approached Weed with confidence.

"Karichwi, I heard about your courage. Chwiik!"

"Thank you, chwik!"

Bulchwi was a very strong Orc. During his short stay at the Orc village Weed heard many stories about this formidable warrior who bravely hunted wyverns.

The Orc chieftain continued:

"We want you to give us the command to attack, chwichchwiiik!"

"Are you sure? Chwiik!"

"Yes. You deserve it. Chwiik! This is the tradition. When the scariest Orc leads the attack the enemy runs away in fear."

Even though there were 400000 Orcs here today, there was no one scarier than Weed.

He gave his sculpture a too unusual and menacing appearance. And so Weed's appearance played another trick on him.

Seeing Weed's confusion, Bulchwi let out a friendly laugh.

"This is a great honor. Chwiik! I envy you. Go on."

"..."

After being told that by such a respected Orc, Weed straightened his posture with pride. Surrounding Orc leaders and all the other Orcs were waiting for his orders, so he raised his glaive high and started to shout: "Orcs! Orcs! Orcs!"

"Orcs! Orcs! Orcs!"

The 400000 Orc army echoed him. Mountains filled with their shouts.

Ground started to shake under their feet.

“Orcs! Orcs! Orcs!”

“Orcs! Orcs! Orcs!”

Weed shouted even louder. The Orcs raised their voice as well.

When the volume reached its peak, Weed swung his glaive furiously and exclaimed: “We’ll crush everyone! Chwii-i-ik!”

“Guo! Guo! Guo!”

Orcs rushed towards Dark Elves fortress like an avalanche.

Chapter 10: Road Selection

“Chwiiik!”

Orc army was approaching the fortress of Dark Elves.

And though their advance was hindered by occasional trees and rocks, tens of thousands of Orcs reached the walls simultaneously.

Elves responded without delay:

“Wall of Fire!”

“Ice Storm!”

“Chain Lightning!”

Fire covered the ground, ice shards and lightning bolts rained down on the approaching horde. Orcs were dying in hundreds, but continued to press on.

When Orcs came close enough to the fortress, Elves started to use their bows. They were using enchanted arrows, freezing or blinding Orcs on hit.

Multiple traps were scattered on their way, spiked pits were swallowing dozens of Orcs at once.

But however well prepared Elves were, nothing was able to stop Orcs' advance.

“Chwiiik!”

“Orcs! Orcs! Orcs!”

Rage was filling Orc warriors. They came to take revenge for all the pain, misery and deaths, caused by Elves! And despite all the resistance and defences Orcs finally reached the walls

“Chwiiik! Start shooting!”

“At once! Chwiiik! Fire!”

Orcs started to shoot their arrows back at Elves. Those, who didn't have a bow were throwing prepared in advance stones. Attacking from below was very hard, Orcs' accuracy was greatly reduced, but still Elves started to

suffer their first losses.

From somewhere in rear ranks Orcs dragged a huge log.

Several dozen orcs lifted it and with their combined effort put one of its ends on the wall. Multiple warriors started to crawl up this log. Some of them fell off, but most of them successfully reached the top.

Fierce fights started to erupt on the walls.

This entire time Weed spent standing on a rock, watching with interest the battle unfold in front of him. Right before his eyes Elves summoned elemental spirits and sent them into the battle. Kasa's of fire, Undine's of water, Sylph's of wind and Noum's of earth. They were soaring in the sky and raining elemental spells on the ground below!

Everywhere he looked Orcs were fighting. Some Elves were even slipping out of the gates to employ guerilla tactics. Something was sparkling, flying, smoking, shouts were heard from every direction. Orcs were dying in thousands, Elves - in dozens.

“Chwiik!”

“Karichwi! I can't wait any more!”

“Yeah! Let's attack! Chwiik!”

Since the attack began, Weed and his tribe's army didn't move one step, and Orcs were starting to grow impatient.

“Chwichik! Still wait.”

Even though battle raged for a long time now, he still didn't lead his warriors into battle. Orcs didn't like it, but still obeyed his orders.

‘It's ridiculous to be reckless in a battle.’

Weed sighed in frustration. Even though Dark Elves were greatly outnumbered, such a reckless attack on the fortress was incomprehensible for him. Orcs were pushing ahead and climbing up walls under constant barrage of spells from the enemy!

Not to mention that many of them caught a cold and their vitality was

reduced. Storming such a well-fortified fortress without any battle plan! What could be more foolish?!

Such serious battles require planning in advance. If only Weed was given some time, he'd think of something and Orcs would have already taken the fortress. But now the Orcs horde was dying because of their own stupidity, and if he doesn't do something soon, the battle will only continue growing more violent and unpredictable...

The scene, observed by Weed could not be compared to the Battle for Fort Odein in any way. The scale was very different and the specific races, involved in the conflict, spiced up the situation.

'The initiative is definitely on the Elves' side.'

Weed was calmly analyzing the battle.

At first glance it seemed like it'll be definitely won by Orcs. They had far greater numbers and were quickly reaching the walls and joining the battle.

But Dark Elves didn't give up.

They were defending a well-fortified fortress with plenty of arrows and correct troops arrangement, that allowed mages and archers to act with maximum efficiency. Besides despite the huge advantage in numbers, only 20 000 Orcs were able to participate in the actual fight at a time.

That number wasn't nearly enough to overwhelm the Elves. Besides they couldn't do much harm while shooting from below, as elemental spells, like wind, were preventing most of their arrows from reaching the top of the wall.

With only small losses Dark Elves were able to successfully repel the Orcs' attacks.

"Stupid beasts!"

"Pigs! At our walls you'll meet your end!"

Feeling their advantage, Elves were ridiculing their opponents. Infuriated by their mocking, Orcs were pushing even more viciously and dying in

hundreds!

“Chwiik!”

“You! Coward! Once I get up there we’ll see who meets what end!
Chwiik!”

Orcs were trying to break the gates, get a foothold on the walls, do anything to breach the Elves’ defences, but nothing succeeded.

In the first half of the battle the horde suffered great losses. More than 40 000 Orcs were dead.

Elves lost only a few hundred fighters. It was a good start for them, but it was still too early to celebrate the victory. There were still plenty of Orcs alive.

To secure their advantage even more a few hundred robed elves gathered on one of the towers. They waved their hands, whispered something, and finally simultaneously exclaimed:

“FLAME!”

A huge stream of fire shot from the tower. It was so strong, that even Weed, who was standing in the distance, felt the heat on his face! In a single moment flame engulfed and reduced to ash thousands of Orcs.

“Chwik?!”

“Chwiik! Chwik!”

Even after such a display of power Orcs didn’t lose their fighting spirit. They were still pressing on their assault, though some of them had a frightened expression now.

Their confidence in quick victory disappeared.

At that moment Weed took a step forward.

‘That’s the moment I waited for.’

He turned around and looked at Orcs standing behind him.

“Chwichwiik! Now it’s our turn!”

“Ka... Karichwi!”

“This is reckless, chwiik!”

Just a few moments ago they were eager to join the fight. But now Weed's suggestion seemed insane to them.

“No! Chwiik! Trust me!”

10 000 Orcs, led by Weed moved to the front lines. Other Orcs and their chieftains were making way for them. They quickly reached the fortress to join the fight, without getting hit by spells once! The Dark Elves ran out of mana and were now waiting for it to regenerate.

The Moment Weed was waiting for finally arrived.

“Go! Attack! Chwiiiik!”

Weed's huge body easily shot up the log and in just a few steps he was on the wall, swinging his glaive.

Dark elves were famous for their sharp eyesight, bow mastery and swift movements. And many of them were able to use elemental magic. But their mana ran out, bows weren't of much use at such a distance and there wasn't much space to move on the crowded wall.

Weed rushed into the crowd of Elves. His strikes were slaying one enemy after another. The orcs, who followed him to the wall were covering his back.

In close combat Dark Elves were using short swords and rapiers, so they couldn't provide any decent resistance against Orcs, once they reached the top of the wall.

Over the next few minutes Weed and his warriors killed more Elves than all the other Orcs combined since the beginning of the assault.

It seemed that Orcs will finally be able to get a solid foothold on the top of the wall, but then Weed and his warriors suddenly jumped off the wall!

“Wall of Fire!”

The place where Weed was fighting just a moment ago got engulfed in

flames.

“A-a-a-argh!”

“It burns! Chwi!..”

The spell, cast by elven mages, burned not only Orcs, but nearby Dark Elves as well. Unlike humans, elves were very rational and didn't hesitate if the sacrifice of few was able to save the many.

After waiting for the spell to end, Weed climbed back on the wall and dived into the fight. If he saw, that Orcs significantly lowered Elves' health somewhere, he was immediately rushing there to finish them. He didn't mind using his fellow Orcs as a shield as well, and often used them to escape deadly fire spells. At the same time he was always ordering warriors from his own army to retreat when required.

There was only one thought in Weed's head:

‘I must use all the 400 000 Orcs to the fullest.’

His tactics was to strike the weak points and use Orcs to cover the retreat! While Dark Elves were killing other Orcs, he was gradually gaining experience. During his first hour of fighting he finished off more than a hundred of Elves, and with the kills of the Orcs from his party added, the final result was even better. And though he didn't have time to check, he was sure, that his reputation among Orcs raised significantly.

When the Orcs' losses reached 70 000, Dark Elves lost only a little over 3 000.

‘It's time to end this...’

There were still about 7 000 Elves defending the fortress, though most of them wounded and weary. They were only holding because of the walls. But they were still great archers nonetheless.

If nothing changes, they might be able to hold because of their great archery skills and win in the end.

“Keep it up!”

“Crush the Elves! Chwiik!”

Orcs, who were waiting under the fortress walls waiting for their turn to climb the log, were screaming in excitement, cheering for their fellow warriors, fighting on top of the wall. And then an Orc stepped out of the fighting crowd and stood on the edge of the wall.

“Oh, it’s him!”

“The ugliest one!”

Both Orcs and Dark Elves were looking at Weed. And he, instead of going back into fight, jumped down from the wall and headed to the gates!

The Orcs, gathered at the wall were respectfully stepping aside to let him pass.

On the way Weed took the glaive in his left hand and pulled out a small figurine. The Hare figurine - one of the five small Fine Pieces.

“Sculpture Destruction! Let it become my strength.”

The figurine in his hand shattered into pieces and Weed’s body got shone brightly.

You used Sculpture Destruction.

Pain and grief fills your heart after destroying one of your Fine Pieces!

You permanently lose 5 points of Art.

Your Fame is reduced by 100.

For a day your Art attribute will be added to your Strength at 1:4 rate.

Sculpture mastery raised by 0.1%.

Over a thousand of his Art points got transformed into strength. And they were multiplied by 4 as well!

“A-a-a-a-ah!”

Weed yelled out and gripped the glaive with all his might. His huge arms were covered by bulging veins, his body filled with uncontrollable power. At that moment Weed didn’t look anything like a person who could understand art of sculpture.

Weed approached the gate and slammed them with his glaive.

Klaaang!

The glaive got shattered into pieces and bounced out of his hand.

“Chwiik?!”

“Chwichwichwik!”

Surrounding Orcs were very excited.

Weed picked up the broken glaive and continued to smash the gates. With every hit more cracks appeared on the gates and around 10th they finally gave in and fell inside.

“Whoah!”

“The gates are broken, chwiik!”

Orcs started to shout excitedly.

Three of the nearby Elves immediately rushed to the breach.

“Don’t let the Orcs pass!”

“Grow it! Grow the new wall!”

“Use magic! We’ll hold him off!”

Three Elves attacked Weed with spears. They needed to get rid of the enemy as fast as possible to free space for mages to create a new wall.

“Die!”

A sharp spear tip shot towards Weed, but he just slightly moved his hand and deflected his opponent’s weapon to the side.

“At once! Attack!”

Three spear struck one spot simultaneously, but Weed wasn’t there any more.

Even with his armor polished and clothes ironed, if he took those 3 strikes, his health would have dropped to a critical level. That’s because his equipment was junk!

In his entire time as an Orc, Weed wasn’t able to find or receive as a reward anything decent. And he didn’t want to spend anything on buying or creating new gear. Besides because of his increased body size creating a

fitting armor required more materials.

“Chwiiik!”

So all he had left was to dodge opponents’ attacks. After using his overwhelming strength to deflect the next combined attack of Elves, Weed lunged forward.

The health of the Elf in the middle dropped by half, but Weed had to jump aside again to dodge the other 2 spears.

Weed was fighting on top of his ability, showing miraculous skill, moving bare inches from the opponents’ spears. He was using everything he knew, both what he was taught and what he learned all by himself. His every move was full of strength and harmony.

As a result by the time firs Orcs reached the breach, Weed has already defeated all 3 elves and the gates were captured.

Weed smiled happily at his brethren and used Lion Roar:

“Orcs, chwichwiik, attack! Destroy! Loot! Kill!”

You used Lion Roar.
Fighting Spirit of nearby friendly troops increased by 200%.
All confusion has been removed.
Leadership increased by 195% for 5 minutes.

The Orcs, who were suffering great losses since the beginning of the battle were back in high spirits!

“Chwiiik!”

“Fight, chwiriri!”

The horde was pouring into the fortress through the broken gates.

In this situation Dark Elves didn’t have a choice but to retreat back to their village. The path to it was riddled with numerous traps and Orcs, who tried to chase them had a hard time. Once more, like at the beginning of the battle, they were dying in hundreds, if not thousands.

But despite all the traps, magic and arrows of Elves, Orcs were advancing! The battle now moved to the edge of the village, where

retreating Elves created another line of defences. They were holding for now, but they couldn't imagine what will they do when the main forces of Orcs arrive.

“Hey, it's mine!”

“I took it first, chwiik!”

Some Orcs started looting the houses.

Weed was watching it with tears. Though Elves didn't have much gold or silver, they had some very rare gemstones, fruits and animal hides. If he sold all of it, he would receive tons of money!

Weed was terribly jealous, but he couldn't stay and take part in looting.

First he has to complete the mission of the Order of Freya. To get into the temple! As fast as possible!

The temple of necromancers was located on a high cliff.

While Orcs were leading their fierce battle against Elves, Buren, Becker, Hosram, Dale and other soldiers were slowly and carefully climbing up. Even before the battle started, Weed planned their path and ordered to climb up.

“Huff!”

“Hold on.”

Soldiers were supporting each other and steadily climbing the mountain. As Weed didn't have any special equipment for this occasion, they could only count on their own strength. And if warriors were climbing more or less confidently, the weak priests of Freya were on the verge of death.

The only thing they could rely on was the Vampire Lord Tori!

He transformed into a giant bat and watched soldiers carefully so none of them falls to their death. And The Death knight was helping exhausted soldiers.

If even a single Dark Elf happened to pass above them at that time, they would be in a trouble. But all the Elves were distracted by the Orcs,

gathered at their walls, so the soldiers managed to reach the top of the cliff without any casualties.

“Huh. Finally.”

Weed was already waiting for them at the agreed place.

“We’re here. No one lost. Now there’s nothing to worry about!”

Buren earnestly pounded his chest, but Weed wasn’t so confident.

‘I’d better rely on Orcs.’

Even though Orcs were dumb, they had great numbers and he didn’t have to mind their losses! But he had to protect the knights, soldiers and priests. If they die, he’ll lose the chance to get reward from the King.

“Hurry. Get ready, we’re going to the Necromancers’ temple.”

Accompanied by Death Knight and Vampire Lord, Weed went ahead.

“Chwiik! Who the hell are they?!”

When they were encountering other Orcs, Weed was just telling them:

“Those are my prisoners. Don’t touch them. Chwiit!”

“He caught humans here. I’m jealous. Chwiik!”

As Weed remained in the form of an Orc, all such random encounters were solved easily.

When they reached the temple, they saw dead Elves at the entrance.

Weed and his soldiers rushed into the dark interior of the temple. They had to hurry: if Orcs kill the necromancers before they do, the quest might not get completed.

There was a heavy and oppressing atmosphere inside the temple. The dark hallways was barely lit by dim torches.

“Chwiiiik!”

Somewhere far ahead the shouts of orcs and noise of colliding blades were heard. It seemed that there was a serious battle between Orcs and Dark Elves.

Weed ordered his soldiers:

“Hurry up. We must make it. Prepare for battle!”

“Yes, sir!”

The squad was quickly moving forward. On the way they saw many shiny things on the walls, but none of the soldiers slowed down.

‘The main goal is to complete the quest of Order of Freya.’

Like ghosts, they shot out of the narrow passage into a wide hallway. In its center a few dozens Elves and Orcs were fighting.

“Chwiik!”

“We will defend this place!”

Seeing such a convenient situation Weed exclaimed:

“Let no one get away, kill everyone!”

Soldiers blocked the way and priest raised their hands and cast a spell:

“By the beauty of Goddess that blinds all men. Blind!”

Blinded Orcs and Elves scattered around, staggering. But Van Hawk and Tori already rushed to them and in less than a minute no one was left alive!

Stepping over the bodies, Weed and his soldiers reached the far side of the hallway. There on the wall was hanged a large map of Yuroki mountains! The Dark Elves fortress there was marked by a black dot, and a bit to the east was another dot, but red.

“Vampire Lord Tori! What are you doing here?! So you succumbed to humans... to those... holy priests of Freya!”

The necromancers, clothed in dark robes couldn't hold their surprise. There were 12 of them, and each was holding a bone stave and beads, filled with dark magic.

Weed cancelled his Sculpture Transformation and stepped forward.

“Necromancers, this place will be your grave.”

While he was speaking Death Knight and Vampire Lord stood by his sides. Priests got ready to use their spells and Knights picked their targets.

The most powerful magic necromancers had was resurrection of undead. It was able to turn dead into skeletons, ghouls, zombies or even more powerful undead!

“Freya’s servants... You have destroyed our work.” - bitterly said one of the necromancers.

There were no corpses nearby and the bodies of Orcs and Elves lying in the distance wouldn’t be of any help against such an army anyway.

It was evident, that dark mages accepted their defeat and were ready to die without a fight.

“I see you came prepared. And came at such a wrong time. Now we won’t be able to return the loose button to its proper place...” - said one of them, bowing his head.

“Barabol!” - exclaimed other necromancers woefully.

“I never believed in divine providence, but if that’s how it must be, then kill me. I’m ready.”

The necromancer slowly stepped forward and got down on his knees in front of Weed.

“Barabol, we’re with you!”

The rest of them followed their leader and got on their knees. They were so close, that Royal Knights could behead them at any moment.

“I hope you will avoid evil in your next lives.”

Weed unsheathed his sword.

He was about to behead them and complete the quest of Order of Freya, but...

‘One moment... Something’s wrong...’

Weed thought over all the recent events. After completing that stupid quest to get the profession of Legendary Moonlight Sculptor he was

always looking for a catch! And now there was something that was troubling him.

‘It seems appropriate to the difficulty level...’

The difficulty was ‘B’, like in case of Lord Tori. The quest that took all he had to finish. And to some extent it was true: to reach necromancers he had to pass their allies, Dark Elves, and that wasn’t an easy task.

‘But why do they calmly accept their deaths?!’

Weed was confused. He wanted to kill the necromancers and finish this long chain of quests a lot. As on his return he would receive even greater reward than before.

The greed flared in his eyes. Besides each of the necromancers was holding a bone staff and beads.

‘Those are at least Rare items... If sold the price will start at \$1000... And if they have additional effects... The price will go up a lot... And there’s not just one or two of them here...’

Weed swallowed. He tightened his grip on the sword and took a step towards necromancer Barabol. One strike and it will be over, but the feeling of something lacking wasn’t leaving.

Thud! Thud! Thud!

There was a sound of Orcs’ footsteps above them. There wasn’t much time left. Weed sheathed the sword.

“Speak, necromancer. What button was you talking about? And what you meant by divine providence?”

Regular players would hurry to finish the quest of Order of Freya, but suspicion, that something was going wrong, lodged itself too deep inside Weed.

“Weed!”

“Destroy them, that is the will of Goddess Freya!” - exclaimed priests of Freya. But they trusted their leader a lot, so they quickly calmed down

Barabol lifted his head and asked:

“You’re not going to kill me, servant of Freya?”

“I’m not a servant. Answer the questions. Or should I just kill you all?”

“We... You won’t believe us anyway. Go on, Freya’s servant, strike! Even from the flames of hell I will curse you!”

“ ... ”

The desire to cut the head of this cocky necromancer was rising again, but Weed restrained himself and said in calm voice:

“I’m giving you a chance. A chance to win my trust. If you tell the truth, I will try to believe it.”

“Really? You swear?”

“Yes. However this is just the promise to listen to you, not to let you live.”

Barabol looked at his kneeled companions, and started to tell his story.

“Since I got a chance, I’ll tell you. But you promised to believe it! The world has a wrong impression about Barr Khan Demoff. He did study necromancy and was known as a great mage, but...”

Barr Khan was a diligent young mage. A genius, recognized across the continent. And once he started to research the eternal life. He was trying to understand why people die and find a cure for terminally ill patients.

However his disciple, Shire, hated the entire world. He used his teacher’s trust and with lies and dark spells he led Barr Khan into the darkness. Thus from the desire to cure all diseases and prolong lives an army of undead was born! In his madness, Barr Khan led his new army across the world, destroying entire cities. And Shire was supporting him, making deals with all the dark powers of the continent.

Many had to join him in his madness, my teacher, who died in one of the battles, was no exception. However, when Barr Khan was finally defeated and his armies dispersed across the continent, we got a chance to think over our actions.

In one of the temples of Beelzebub we found a manuscript and discovered truth about those events. And now we want to return everything to how it was supposed to be. To free Barr khan from the dark bindings and punish Shire.

Ding!

You completed the quest 'The Rise of Dark Forces in the Plains of Despair'.
Necromancers, that you considered to be the worst of evils proved to be innocent. They do not try to take revenge on the world, but correct their past mistakes.
Reward: Receive from the High priest of Order of Freya.

Weed smiled.

'The quest is complete! I didn't even have to kill them.'

When he was looking for Helen's Grail and Fargo's Crown he had to return to the Order of Freya to complete the quest. But this time it was done right on the spot and Weed was pleased.

But in the next moment!

'Damn!'

Weed kicked the nearby stone with all his might.

'The items!'

If he killed the necromancers, he'd get all their items. Bone staves, magical beads and possibly something else. The items he could sell to mage players! Receiving one such set was considered a great success, and there were 12 of them!

'Idiot! Showed some compassion and lost so much money! Why, why!? So much money...'

While Weed was immersed in his inner suffering, Barabol continued speaking:

"We came here, to the plains of Despair, and made an alliance with Dark elves to hold back Shire. Last time, when the undead army was defeated, he managed to escape. And since then he was gathering the new army of undead. Even though it's not anywhere near the old one in numbers, it's

still a formidable force, when led by a dark wizard. Besides, fearing persecution and death, he decided to kill himself to achieve immortality. He became a Lich!”

The army of undead! Led by the one who caused the same disaster in the past, now it was here, in the Plains of Despair.

“To be able to stop him we had to beg the Dark elves for their support. And to ensure their own safety they agreed to help us. This fortress was going to be the main obstacle on the way of the new undead army. We have to unite to stop this new threat! We need your help for that.”

Ding!

New Quest: The Undead Legion of Shire.

The secret, kept from entire world! It was Shire who caused all the disasters, blamed on Barr Khan Demoff. After that famous battle he disappeared to create a new army of undead.

To survive Orcs and Dark Elves have to stop their mutual hostility and stand united against the undead army of the dark mage. Gather all the forces and repel the attacks of the immortal army of undead.

Difficulty: A.

Reward: Book of Barr Khan.

Restrictions: The Undead Legion will start the war in 30 days.

‘A’ rank difficulty! Weed completed the quest and received the next quest in the chain. The battle against the undead army! It will be the great event for the entire continent. Moreover, no one in the game has ever received the quest of such difficulty! Because there were special conditions to be met in order to be able to receive it.

While shocked Weed was thinking about it, another system message popped in front of him.

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You got an opportunity to complete a unique quest, associated with the game’s set of professions.

Corresponding to the continent’s history, no player was able to choose the profession of necromancers, as they were considered the true evil among the mages. When you defeat Shire and complete this quest, the ability to chose this profession will be unlocked.

Background: Because of the mistake of the past necromancers were being killed or banished to the darkest corners of the continent. Because of them it was hard for them to find disciples and pass their knowledge to new generations. Once they restore their good name, they will be able to return to the kingdoms’ capitals and start a new life.

The quest of ‘A’ rank difficulty.

And it was opening a new profession of necromancer too.

“Sir!”

Buren, Becker, Hosram, Dale and others were looking at Weed with thrilled expressions and straight backs.

Knights of justice!

It was a great honor for them to fight against the Undead Legion.

“Goddess Freya...”

Priests were reciting prayers.

Weed looked at them and said:

“I have decided...”

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