

KW



소설 속 에스트라

지감승 류정 평택지 정민소영

The Novel's Extra

- 소설 속 엑스트라 -

- Part 1 -

-Author-

Jee Gab Song

[FudgeNouget (Wuxiaworld)]

- STORY -

Waking up, Kim Hajin finds himself in a familiar world but an unfamiliar body.

A world he created himself and a story he wrote, yet never finished.

He had become his novel's extra, a filler character with no importance to the story.

The only clue to escaping is to stay close to the main storyline.

However, he soon finds out the world isn't exactly identical to his creation.

Chapter 0

The Story Within the Novel

===

[Kim Suho]

17 – 27 years old in the story

A righteous, honest man and a hard-worker. Though he comes from a common background, he is of extraordinary character and talent. As a genius who made his name known in the military academy, he possesses a sense of justice and other upright characteristics befitting a hero. He carries a special secret that he hasn't revealed to anyone.

[Shin Jonghak]

17 – 27 years old in the story

The fourth generation descendant of the Jinsung Corp, one of the greatest chaebol in Korea, which contends for the number one spot. As a child of a chaebol family, he is a narcissist and an elitist. Because of his personality and the sense of inferiority he feels against Kim Suho, he later becomes a villain.

'I have to be the best. I cannot tolerate anyone being above me.' With such obstinacy, he confronts Kim Suho.

===

The above two were the two main characters of my novel.

Though the novel had many more characters, write them all down was impossible. Within my novel were billions of characters. Unless the characters have 'important roles' like the heroine or the helper, giving a character a name wasn't necessary.

...Why was I saying all this?

—Hero Association's Agent Military Academy Seoul Branch Graduation, Class of 2024, Rank 1 Cadet, Kim Suho.

It was because the story in my novel was happening in front of my eyes.

Called up to the stage, Kim Suho walked up with a stiffened face as though he was nervous.

We were in a huge auditorium suggestive of a temple. In it were 3000 cadets and

thousands of spectators. Their gazes all turned to one person, Kim Suho.

“He’s Kim Suho? Wow.”

“He’s so handsome~”

Several women watched with admiration and adoration.

“...This is why people say Gift is all that matters. Who cares if you try hard? People like him end up taking first place anyways.”

“That guy completely lucked out with his Gift.”

And naturally, he received the jealousy and envy of young teenagers.

“His grades are said to be the greatest in the past 10 years.”

“Yeah, I’ve heard of him. His Gift was announced too, right? What was it again... Sword Saint?”

Guild associates, who came to watch the best cadet in recent history, flashed their eyes. They were looking down from the highest seats of the auditorium. However, I could hear their voices. They had to be at least a kilometer away, but as long as I looked their way, I could hear their words clearly.

Not only their words, but I could also see their faces, almost as though I was right in front of them.

Perhaps, this was my ‘Gift.’

“Yes, in regards to swords, he is said to receive the world’s protection.”

“Hm... That’s a pretty vague description, but I guess the information from the academy is all like that.”

“We called dibs on that kid so don’t touch him.”

I recognized one of the whispering faces.

Yun Seung-Ah. An important assistant of the main character and one of the heroines who almost became the main character’s lover. Just when the two of them were hitting it off – in reality, when the main character was hitting off with many of the heroines –

I suspended my novel. Thus, the two never became lovers.

“Dibs? What dibs. When it comes to cadets, there is no such thing.”

At another guild associate’s callous words, Yun Seung-Ah smiled sweetly and rebutted.

“Is that why 'Essence of the Strait' can’t escape second place?”

I knew Yun Seung-Ah’s face. Surprisingly, she looked like my first love from college. That was probably because I thought of her when I was describing Yun Seung-Ah’s character. Though, she was my crush to be exact.

“...Can I take that as a challenge?”

“I’m kidding, of course. Plus, we still have three years to go before we can scout any of them.”

“It’s two years.”

“...You know contacting them before they graduate is illegal, right?”

“That’s only if you’re found out.”

Yun Seung-Ah and the man glared at each other. With their staring contest as the starting point, the VIP seats’ atmosphere began to heat up. And thus, the fight for Kim Suho had already begun.

—Class of 2024, Rank 2 Cadet, Shin Jonghak.

Meanwhile, the other main character stood up.

He was the descendant of the Jinsung clan. His appearance rivaled Kim Suho as well. The audience stirred just like when Kim Suho walked up. But unlike with Kim Suho, envy and jealousy didn’t exist. There was only admiration and adoration. With Kim Suho, they thought, ‘Why is he better than me?’ but with Shin Jonghak, it was, ‘He was better than me from birth.’

As if to show off his noble blood, Shin Jonghak walked up to the stage completely composed.

Kim Suho and Shin Jonghak.

Standing side by side, the two glared at each other.
Electricity seemed to crackle from their eyes.

Without a shadow of the doubt, these two were characters from my novel.

Then where was I?

I wasn't on the stage but in the farthest back seat of the auditorium. I wasn't 'one out of three thousand', but a member of the 'three thousand.' No guild associate looked my way.

"Chundong, what rank are you? I'm rank 2900."

Next, to me, a boy resembling a piglet asked. On his nametag were the characters 'Kim Ho Sup'. This meant that he had an eventual role. Though he couldn't be a Hero because of his nonexistent physical abilities, his Gift was outstanding for information gathering.

"Chundong-chan★?"

"...I don't know."

I didn't know who I was. I didn't even know why my name was Chundong.
If something like this had to happen, shouldn't I be one of the two on stage?

"Hey, c'mon, if you don't know that..."

"I don't know."

Once again, I didn't know. This world was the novel I wrote, but I was in the body of a character I had never written before. Other than being a cadet in the Agent Military Academy, I was the most ordinary and the most connectionless character, the type whose name wouldn't exist anywhere in the novel. In other words... I was an extra.^[1]

...No, I was a speck of dust.

1. In English, an extra is usually referred to as "background actor/performer/cast/etc", but I will be sticking with 'extra'.

Chapter 1

Cube (1)

One day, I received an email. The sender asked if he could remake my novel. At the time, I was dumbfounded. I might have been on a short hiatus, but to ask to remake a novel that was in paid serialization...

I, of course, refused. In fact, I didn't reply.

It was partly because doing something like that without permission would go against copyright laws, but it was also because I was ashamed of the 'hiatus' status I was in.

The webnovel I was writing was called 'The Returnee Hero.'

It wasn't a sensation, but it was a fairly popular novel and the greatest hit in my five years of writing.

But at the time I received the email, I had been on hiatus for three months.

The reason was simple. The words didn't come to me.

At first, I poured my passion into writing. My personal note on the world's setting neared 50,000 characters^[1], and I poured my heart out in writing each chapter.

But after a year of writing, I fell into an awful slump.

Even so, the novel continued for six months, reaching the mid-late stage of the story. But because I forcefully pushed myself to write, the story was full of plot holes, and the personalities of the characters had collapsed. Unsurprisingly, the number of readers dropped by the day. I was too scared to even read the comments.

In the end, I chose to go on hiatus.

But no matter how long I rested, I couldn't continue with the story, not even a single sentence came out.

When I was wallowing in misery from realizing my lacking writing skills...

I received another email asking to remake my novel.

[Please. This is for personal satisfaction. I will not reveal the remake version of the novel anywhere. It will only stay between me and you. Who knows? Maybe you'll be inspired by the remake and come up with a way to continue the story...]

It was a fairly long email consisting of six sentences, but what it was asking for was

simple.

He wanted to remake my novel for self-satisfaction.

How much did he like my novel to send an email like this? Since I wasn't particularly proud of my work, I agreed, feeling thankful and ashamed.

...In that case, was that the cause of this situation?

The chance of winning the lottery was said to be 1 in 8,145,060. Then what was happening to me at this moment had to be a 1 in 7 billion chance.

I was standing in an ordinary family home.

But the world I was in wasn't my world, and I wasn't 'me.' Though one might think I was being philosophical, I really wasn't. It was just the best way to describe the situation I was in.

I had become an extra in my novel.

An extra I had no memory writing about.

Kim Chundong.

Chundong lived in an ordinary apartment room, but he didn't have parents. As for why, I, of course, didn't know.

At 9 years old, Chundong was admitted to 'Agent Military Academy,' a place to nurture elites to fight monsters and Djinns.

What ability did Chundong possess to pass its entrance exam?

I didn't know.

I didn't know anything about him. I didn't even know his face. I wasn't kidding. I really didn't.

When I look in the mirror...

(?)

That's what I saw. An oval with a question mark.

This crazy body possession(?) or transmigration(?) was completely unreasonable. I had gone to bed just like any other day, but when I woke up, I found myself on the last day of the semester at Agent Military Academy.

At first, I had two suspicions.

First was that I was being pranked.

But that idea was shot down in just five seconds. I couldn't even be bothered to explain why.

Second was that I was dreaming.

But I naturally came to dismiss the idea. As everyone knew, the thought of being in a dream never occurred to dreaming people, and more importantly, no dream continued for two weeks with such a clear sense of reality.

As a result, I spent the past two weeks pondering whether the 'world inside the novel' should be treated as the 'reality I was in.'

Ding Dong—

Tatatatatata~

Just like I've been doing in the last two weeks, I was lying in bed and staring blankly at the ceiling when my smartphone alarm began to ring. Glancing over, I saw that it was 'time to go to school.'

"Why the hell do I need to go to school."

13 days ago, it was Agent Military Academy's graduation. But the ones graduating were only non-combatant cadets, and non-combatant cadets couldn't be called Heroes. Combat class cadets had to attend the academy for three more years.

These three years would be spent at [Cube], a Hero Academy.

Unfortunately, this damned Chundong guy was a combat type cadet. Again, I had no clue who he was.

"Ah... How frustrating."

I had barely done anything for two weeks. I spent most of my time on the internet, ate food when I got hungry, went back online to search for a way out, laughed at the surprisingly funny variety shows airing on TV, ate food when I got hungry... Anyways, the only noteworthy event was going to Seoul two days ago for the three-hour long 'Cube Entrance Ceremony'.

I didn't want to go, but I had no other choice since I was told I would be expelled if I didn't attend.

"I do think I need to go, but..."

I couldn't figure out who dropped me here, for what reason and with what power. But after living idly for two weeks, I reluctantly came to accept my fate. It seemed I would live this way for a long time. In that case, I at least needed to make a living for myself. In my novel, being a 'Hero' was anyone's dream job. Though things become serious midway through because of Villains, the hiatus was not long afterwards. I just had to survive until then. When the time came, I was sure I'd figure something out.

[7:33 AM]

There was only 57 minutes until school. I got up and trudged to the bathroom. Standing in front of the mirror, mister question mark greeted me.

"...Screw this question mark. Is it ever going to go away?"

Without joking, my face was a question mark. I didn't know why. It wasn't because I didn't describe my face. If that were the case, it didn't make sense for the other billions of people to have their own faces. So why was only Chundong's face a question mark?

"I don't get it."

Murmuring begrudgingly, I washed my face. I could feel my skin. I had hair too. That made things all the more creepy.

After cleaning myself up a bit, I changed into Cube's uniform, which I got at the entrance ceremony. Other than that, I had no other baggage.

People who saw me in this uniform would undoubtedly send looks of envy, But I didn't know what I was doing.

My face was a freaking question mark, how was I supposed to figure anything out?

Turning the doorknob, I glanced back.

My home for the past two weeks. The apartment room I barely found thanks to the address written in my cadet card. It seemed I got attached to it in this short period of time. I felt like I would miss it.

Cube floated in the middle of the East Sea. Once I left, I probably wouldn't come back.

“Ehew.”

Putting behind the big apartment room I was happy to have, I stepped into the dark and unfamiliar world.

1. 50,000 Korean characters is about 10,000 English words

Chapter 2

Cube (2)

The world's greatest training institute boasting state-of-the-art magic, science, and engineering.

[Cube]

Cube was the name of a huge island located in the East Sea. This artificial island was twice the size of Yeouido.^[1]

In this huge area, there were only about 5000 Hero cadets, of which 1300 were first-years. While 2000 non-combatants graduated two weeks ago, elite cadets from all over the world gathered here, making it more competitive than before. In a way, the place was too harsh and dreary to be home for 17 to 19 year olds.

And starting from the second year, magicians who chose to become Heroes would come from the 'National Magic University,' so that was another 200~300 cadets.

Furthermore, there were training instructors, cafeteria ladies, cleaners, recruiters visiting occasionally, government associates, engineers who did maintenance and operations, soldiers dispatched as securities, doctors and researchers for taking care of cadets, convenience store workers who worked under Cube, and more... With all these people, about 50,000 people resided in Cube.

Naturally, this place was a highly important hubbub where the attention of investors gathered. Given that my novel's setting was faithfully followed, Korea was a world power rivaling the United States. I seemed to remember listing several reasons for it, but the more obvious reason was that I was Korean.

In any case, Chundong was a member of Cube so he could be said to be an elite. But I didn't allocate any story for Chundong.

So Chundong's destiny should've been to live in areas detached from the main storyline. While he would not have lived the important and burdening life of the main character, he probably would have lived a comfortable worry-free life.

...And that was the life I wanted too.

Staring at the door to the classroom, I sighed.

[Novice – Veritas]

Novice referred to first year cadets, while Veritas was the name of the class. Simply put, I was in year 1 class 1.

I knew what this class was.

Shin Jonghak and Kim Suho were in this class, and as cliques formed around them, many schemes, mostly started by Shin Jonghak and his followers, would make the class rowdy. As a member of the class, I would most likely be swept in regardless of my will.

“Huu.”

After collecting my breath, I slowly and carefully opened the door.

The interior was sleek; white with no sign of dust and three long desks cascading up. Where should I sit? I looked around the classroom and found Shin Jonghak sitting on the farthest seat back. With his eyes closed and his hands in his pocket, he seemed imposing. Next to him was his childhood friend, Yoo Yeonha, chattering.

The two of them didn't pay any attention to me.

Thank. God.

I sat down on the edge seat of the middle row.

Like a proper extra, I looked straight ahead in a daze. There was no chalkboard, but a projection screen for holograms to be shown.

Looking at it, I couldn't help but sigh. After going through high school and even mandatory military service, I couldn't believe I had to go back to school. There couldn't be a worse calamity.

“...Huaam.”

Cube's semester began on February. The outside was cold and the inside being warm naturally made me sleepy.

Currently, it was 8 A.M. Class began at 8:30.

In truth, I didn't expect to arrive this early. Going from Seoul to Cube was quick using the 'Portal,' but I expected to get lost once I got here. However, there was something called the Cube Bus, a bus that ran every 10 minutes around Cube that didn't exist in my original setting.

Thinking about it now, it was a mistake on my part to have the main character walk

around the huge campus all the time. Since the novel became a real world, it seemed it was fixing plot holes on its own.

...Anyways, let's sleep a little. I don't want to think anymore.
Closing my eyes, I dropped my head on the desk.

—Now!

A thunderous shout woke me up.
When I opened my eyes, the instructor was behind the podium.

“Today's the first day, so there won't be any special training, but I hope you all did your morning training. Training is never wrong, especially in the morning when mana density is high.”

Morning training?

...Oh, right. There was something like that. A training ground that opened up from 5 A.M. to 8 A.M. I had hurriedly stuffed it into the story to give the leading characters an opportunity to meet.

“Now, let's start with self-introductions. I'm Kim Soohyuk, the instructor in charge of you all for the year.”

That name, I could vaguely recall it.

“My ranking point is 3850. World rank 9737. By the Association's classification, I would be high-intermediate rank grade 5.”

The students' eyes lit up. It was understandable. There were around two million Heroes in the world. Rank 9737 meant he was very skilled.

“I think that's enough for my introduction.”

Kim Soohyuk seemed to have liked the students' reactions as the corners of his mouth curled up to a grin.

“The first day will feel special. You might not have slept due to excitement and worry, or maybe you're feeling great about being able to improve yourselves. Heh, maybe

you're happy to see your crushes again."

The cadets broke out into a small laughter. But the instructor froze his expression sternly.

"But Cube isn't the same as it was before. I promise you, there will be no time for relationships. In Cube, you will experience several real combat situations. Look forward to experiencing how fearful the real world is."

His roguish smile sent a chill down my back.
Combat training, I had to take part in that too.

"Next, Cube is objective. The only indicator of your success will be your grade. Guilds will only look at your grade. Thus, we will grade you accurately and strictly. If you underperform, you will be held back. Statistically, less than half of Cube's cadets graduate without repeating a semester. Even then, you can only be held back up to two years. Any more than that, you will be expelled. If you can't become a Hero, you will become an agent or a mercenary. I take it that that's not what you want."

After giving the students a scare, the instructor paused and scanned the students' faces.

"I can already see a few faces I'm familiar with."

It was the same for me.

Kim Suho, Shin Jonghak, Yoo Yeonha, Chae Nayun, Rachel, Yi Yeonghan.

These six were the important characters I could see at a first glance. Shin Jonghak sat with Yoo Yeonha. Since Kim Suho and Chae Nayun saw each other as rivals, they were distanced. Princess Rachel sat alone, and Yi Yeonghan sat behind Kim Suho.

"I repeat. At Cube, you will need to confirm the things you've learned until now and hone your skills to be used in battle. There will be no kind training here. Remember that."

With that, Kim Soohyuk announced.

"Now get ready. What's scheduled for today won't take long. The first task is 'main weapon selection.'"



“Any weapon you can think of should be here.”

A main weapon was exactly what it sounded like. High ranking Heroes called their weapons ‘treasured weapons,’ while weapons above [Unique] grade were given the title ‘armament.’

But I didn’t know what my main weapon was. I knew nothing about Chundong’s past.

“Stand in front of the weapon you want. We’ll supply you with the training weapons. But don’t look down on them just because they’re training weapon. Their market price is 5 million won.”

There were all sorts of weapons, more so than I could have ever imagined.

Sword, spear, saber, dagger, rapier, halberd, greatsword, zweihander, bow, gun, whip, gauntlet, etc... The 100 students of Veritas class stood in front of the weapon they wanted.

“Choose carefully. Once you pick your main weapon, you won’t be able to change it for at least 6 months.”

Sword and spear were obviously the most popular choice. Kim Suho and Shin Jonghak stood in front of a sword and a spear respectively. 70 out of 100 chose the sword, spear, or saber, the so-called Holy Trinity of weapons. On the other hand, Yoo Yeonha chose the whip, Chae Nayun chose the bow, and Rachel chose the rapier.

However, I simply stood in a daze.

“Kim Chundong, why are you standing still?” Kim Soohyuk asked.

I stared blankly at the one weapon no one gave a glance.

The weapon of choice in the modern world, one that didn’t require an instruction manual and one that anyone could use with a click. But in this world, this weapon was the weakest lump of metal, a weapon avoided by every Hero. Most likely, it was only here for the sake of having all kinds of weapons be here.

But this was the only choice I had.

I couldn’t use any close ranged weapons. Even if Chundong was talented in one, I didn’t want to participate in close ranged combat where blood splattered everywhere.

“Kim Chundong.”

The instructor’s voice fell low, and other students’ gazes fell on me. Shin Jonghak and Kim Suho were among them.

I didn’t like being at the center of attention.

I quickly walked up and grabbed the weapon.

I could feel the weight of the metal in my hand as the smell of rust tickled my nose.

More eyes fell on me.

The weapon in my hand was a handgun.

1. Yeouido is a large island in Seoul, 8.4 square kilometers in size and home to 31,000 people.

Chapter 3

Cube (3)

Guns were still excellent weapons in this world. But that was only for ordinary soldiers who couldn't wield mana.

Rather than traditional bullets, this world's guns used 'magic bullets', bullets containing compressed mana with the power to kill low-intermediate rank grade 8 monsters. In comparison, the training saber said to cost 5 million won could only kill low-rank monsters on average. So, the gun was a stronger weapon on its own.

But Heroes and mercenaries who could wield magic power didn't choose guns. That was because 'magic power' couldn't be applied to guns, so no matter how strong the user of a gun was, the weapon had a clear limit in potency.

In choosing a main weapon, the most important aspect was its origin. In short, a weapon's grade went up the grander its origin was.

For instance, guns were separated into three grades - mass-produced, custom-made, or masterpiece. Swords, on the other hand, had much more - artifact, armament, treasured, mythical, legendary, etc.

This was because myths and legends were manifested in this world.

The sword was a weapon of long and deep history. Naturally, many swords had descended from myths and legends.

Sword of Freyr, demon blade Muramasa, magic sword Tyrting, holy sword Durendal, king's sword Excalibur, etc... In this world, many swords of legends remained undiscovered in 'Dungeons' or 'Towers'. Each of them was a priceless treasure. Of course, these treasures could only be used by those who were proficient with swords.

Consequently, Heroes chose more ancient weapons. Even if they reached a bottleneck in their growth, a high grade weapon could help them break through.

"...Kim Chundong."

Kim Soohyuk called my name once more before activating his smartwatch. For some reason, I could also see the information hidden by the information protection system. It was information about me, cadet Kim Chundong.

“Didn’t you use a sword?”

As expected of an extra, Kim Chundong was an ordinary swordsman.

“I decided to change my weapon.”

“After coming all the way to Cube?”

“Yes.”

Kim Soohyuk didn’t look happy with my choice but he nodded with a slight frown.

“That’s fine. Cadets can make their own choices at Cube. Instructors won’t interfere at all. But that also means the responsibility falls on cadets.”

Kim Soohyuk moved on, but the whispering among students didn’t stop. Whispers that should have been too quiet for me to hear, for some reason, I could hear them clearly. It seemed this was Chundong’s Gift. How useless.

“Gun? Is that guy insane?”

“Why did he even come to Cube if he wants to be a mercenary?”

Before entering Cube, cadets got to try all sorts of weapons. It was to find the weapon that suited their Gift. But a Gift wasn’t needed to use guns. You just had to put your finger on the trigger and pull.

“You can easily change the main weapon you chose today. And regardless of what you chose, you will go through the same training and tests. That means the weaknesses of a weapon will be yours to handle.”

Kim Soohyuk announced while looking my way.

I get it, damn it. I just didn’t have any other choice!

The cadets here had been attending military academies since they were 7 or 8. In other

words, they had been practicing cutting, slicing, breaking, and shooting for 10 years.

But I was different.

I didn't inherit Chundong's memories, and I was far from a swordsman in the real world. Heck, I wasn't even into sports. I wasn't much of a thrill-seeker either.

In the end, I could only choose a long ranged weapon, so a bow or a gun. Thanks to Korea's military service, I was at least familiar with guns.

"Now, we'll assign you your rooms and your personal belongings will be sent there. Afterward, you're free. Classes will start four days later, that's next Monday."

Kim Soohyuk spoke as he looked at me with pity.

And thus, the main weapon selection ended.



"Yo, gunner, are you for real?"

"I just don't understand. Are you one of those attention seekers? This is the first time I've heard of someone choosing a gun at Cube."

On the way to the dorm, a group of guys struck up a conversation. I simply ignored their sarcastic remarks.

Seeing me unperturbed by their provocations, the group left after snickering to themselves. As expected of teenage boys, they were more interested in female students.

Even I turned my sights their way.

Chae Nayun, Rachel, and Yoo Yeonha. These three girls' beauty had far surpassed my settings.

While I observed them with a side-glance, we arrived at the dorm.

"Here are the dorms for the first years."

Six extravagant skyscrapers stood in front of me.

According to Kim Soohyuk, each building had 100 floors, each consisting of 5 rooms.

The rooms were distributed according to grades, but even if one's grades were dead bottom, they still their own room. Agent Military Academy's top three male and top three female cadets got the penthouses. Kim Suho was the only one who gave up on it,

saying it was too big for him to use.

“Guys are to the right, girls are to the left. The key to your rooms will be stored in the smartwatches you’ll get now.”

While Kim Soohyuk explained, other first year classes arrived. If I remembered correctly, the first year classes were Veritas, Acceptance, Intelligence, Wisdom, Cultivation, Honor, Virtue, Friendship, Potential, and World – a total of 10 classes. Should I try looking for other major characters? Some of them should be antagonists...

“Chundong, Kim Chundong!”

“Huh, me? Why?”

“...Why?”

Kim Soohyuk was calling me. I was just distracted for a moment, but Kim Soohyuk’s eyes narrowed like a hawk. His fierce gaze made me froze. Seemingly disappointed by my reaction, Kim Soohyuk closed his eyes and sighed.

“...Your smartwatch, come to take it.”

“Ah, yes.”

I almost fell over from my legs shaking. I could hear other students laughing behind me.

You dare laugh at your creator?

I got angry momentarily, but I generously chose to forgive them.

Since I didn’t have a way to get back at them, I didn’t have any other choice.



The room assigned to me was bigger than Chundong’s apartment and came with a couch, bed, rice cooker, TV, computer, and even magic tools.

“...I still can’t get used to it.”

Slouching down on the comfy couch, I pondered.

The weight of the handgun in my hand didn’t feel real.

Thinking about it now, it might have been better to leave Cube if I was going to choose a gun. Having been a cadet at the Agent Military Academy should have been enough to let me live without starving.

But my problem didn't end there.

Why I was sent to this world and how I could go back. To find out, I had the feeling I needed to stay close to the main storyline.

...Though, I doubt I could get too close with just a gun.

Should I try shooting it to see its power?

“Mmm...”

I thought of something good.

Jumping up from the couch, I aimed at the wall and closed my left eye. Just when I was about to pull the trigger...

—ding dong

The bell rang.

An electronic voice rang out beyond the door.

—Rank 934, Kim. Chun. Dong. Take. Your. Luggage.

It was a robot. Throwing the gun on the couch, I opened the door and saw a fairly big box on the ground.

It seemed Chundong sent his belonging beforehand. I picked up the box and brought it in.

[Agent Military Academy Rank 1543, Hero Military Academy Rank 934 Kim Chundong. Personal belonging.]

Rank 934, wasn't that too average?

With a smirk, I pulled off the tape.

“...Huh?”

There was only a single item in the big box.

But I knew what it was.

This wasn't Chundong's, but mine.

This was from my previous life... Though, it felt a bit weird to call it a 'previous' life.

Anyways, this was the laptop I had used on Earth to write my novel.

Chapter 4

Synchronization (1)

Eight students were gathered in a big room on the highest floor of dorm 1. They were all sitting in an arrogant delinquent-like manner, laughing loudly at even the smallest things. Occasionally, they stole stealthy glances at the one who called them over. But the person in question remained silent as though he couldn't care less.

"Oh right, Jonghak, isn't there a gun user in your class?"

One man asked him. He was a generic good-looking guy with an amiable smile. Shin Jonghak opened his eyes narrowly and stared back at him.

"...Um, I just heard it from somewhere. Did I hear wrong?"

"I don't know. I'm not interested in trash."

"R-Right. I'm not really interested either, but I was just curious who the fool was, haha."

"Hanjun, you sure are curious about the strangest things~"

A captivating voice cut through. Jin Hanjun turned his head and saw a long-haired girl smiling charmingly. It was Yoo Yeonha. Feeling his heart beating, the flustered Jin Hanjun blurted out.

"O-Oh, Yeonha. Y-You know, I was always like that."

"What was his name? Chundong? Chunbun? It was a pretty old-fashioned name. Anyways, don't pay too much attention to him."

"But he sure was pathetic. Why did that son of a bitch come all the way to Cube if he was going to choose a gun?"

The foul language came from Kim Horak. Bulky muscles, an intimidating expression, and a large physique. Even with just one glance, it was easy to see that he specialized

in close ranged combat.

Jin Hanjun asked Kim Horak, "You know him?"

"I'm in Jonghak's class, idiot. I'm going to destroy him in combat training. I'll disable him and chase him out."

Everyone knew Cube's schedule. There were classes five days a week and combat training three days a week.

Classes referred to comprehensive magic power training and physical training, while combat training referred to battles, monster hunts, rescue missions, and more.

"I'll destroy that son of a..."

"Don't waste your time."

With a single sentence, Shin Jonghak cut down the coarse locker room talk. Kim Horak, who was growling just a moment ago, fell silent.

"Even if you win against someone so low rank, you'll be the one losing points. It's better to challenge higher ranked cadets who you can win against for sure. For example..."

"Chae Nayun, try fighting her. I'm sure you'll win."

Yoo Yeonha cut in. Shin Jonghak narrowed his eyes and glared at her, but Yoo Yeonha continued unfazed.

"Fist against bow. It's easy."

"...Huh? Ah, yeah, I can win. But..."

Challenging her was difficult.

However, he swallowed his words, wanting to look good in front of Yoo Yeonha.

"But?"

"...It would be too pitiful. You know, my opponents often end up half-dead."

“There’s nothing wrong with that.”

“...Huh?”

“Stop.”

Shin Jonghak stopped their conversation.

Though Yoo Yeonha was displeased, she feigned indifference. She quietly suppressed the unpleasant feeling rising from the corner of her heart.

‘Shin Jonghak liked Chae Nayun. I’m not so stupid as to be jealous. I just found the situation funny.’ Yoo Yeonha consoled herself.

“I’m leaving now. It’s almost ten.”

At Cube, male and female students were only allowed to interact until 22:00. After giving a bright smile to mask her hurt feelings, Yoo Yeonha stood up.

“Oh, good night.”

“Good night, Yeonha!”

“See you later!”

All the male cadets other than Shin Jonghak saw her off to the door.



Five minutes away from dorm 1 was a training facility called the ‘Novice Fitness Center.’ This 1000 square meter facility was filled with magical devices and equipment for exercise and training. The amount of money needed to construct such an environment would be well over a hundred million won, but there was barely anyone using the facility.

But just because the training facility was empty, it didn’t mean the future of Heroes was bleak.

While cadets were would-be Heroes that would come to receive the admiration and envy of billions of people, they were still teenagers. Simply put, there weren’t many high schoolers willing to go out of their way to train on the first day.

“I knew you’d be here.”

But an exception always existed. Even Hero Academy had a pervert who enjoyed training from the first day. Kim Suho, who was drenched in sweat and wrestling with an exercise equipment, widened his eyes at the sudden voice.

“Chae Nayun? You’re also here to train?”

“Yeah, but I won’t be as barbaric as you.”

With a wry smile, Chae Nayun pointed at the gravitation room. Seeing the terrifying cylindrical room, Kim Suho frowned.

“That’s a tough one. I can never last long in there.”

Kim Suho wiped his sweat with a towel he brought.

“It’s not like you can’t, you just don’t need to. I’m an archer, so I need to train in there. Plus, it’s not that hard. I’ve been doing it since I was 8.”

“8 years old?”

“Yep. I have one in my house.”

“...Aha.”

Setting up a gravitation room cost several hundreds of millions of won at least. From what Chae Nayun said, it could be inferred that she came from a very wealthy background.

Just like Shin Jonghak, Chae Nayun was a fourth generation chaebol. But rather than a twisted superiority complex, she carried a righteous sense of rivalry. She believed she could surpass her rivals through hard-work and self-cultivation. But in front of the monster standing in front of her, her belief always seemed to waver.

“...Oh, right. There’s another sharpshooter in our class now.”

Kim Suho mentioned, to which Chae Nayun tilted her head curiously.

“...Sharpshooter? Oh, that Chudong or whatever guy?”

“Uh, yeah, him... What’s up with that look? Do you not like him?”

Like Kim Suho pointed out, Chae Nayun’s face was stiffening frighteningly.

“He’s not a sharpshooter. Guns can only shoot up to a kilometer at best. I still don’t understand why that Dongchu guy picked a gun.”

His name had unknowingly changed from Chudong to Dongchu, but Kim Suho wasn’t so foolish as to point out her mistake.

“I think he gave up. Maybe there was trouble at home or something. Since being a Cube cadet won’t stay on your records if you leave early, he’s probably just going to stay for a while.”

“Gave up? Don’t say something like that so easily.”

“...Who are you to tell me what and what not to do?”

For a moment, slight anger emerged from Chae Nayun’s eyes. Kim Suho’s teaching tone didn’t sit well with her, who saw him as her rival.

“...Kuhum. Sorry.”

“Anyways, if you don’t want to lose, keep working hard. I’m going.”

“Yeah, see you later.”

“Please, I’m right next doors...”

Chae Nayun smirked and went into the gravitation room.

The gravitation room multiplied the gravity by a certain factor, thus increasing the pressure on one’s bloodstream. Training in this cylindrical room required one to operate magic power under heavy gravity, and it was easily one of the most painful training methods.

For Kim Suho, just looking at the room made him shudder. Seeing Chae Nayun walk into it nonchalantly, he could only shake his head.



Inside Kim Chundong's room, I held my breath while looking at a laptop screen. I still couldn't understand what I was seeing. I could see it, but my brain refused to process what was in front of me. It just seemed too absurd.

"...What is this?"

After a long silence, I blurted out with a trembling voice.

===[Synchronizing... 70% Complete]===

1. Kim Chundong

[Current SP: 54]

▷Stats

*Variable Stats

[Strength 4]

[Stamina 4.3]

[Speed 4]

[Perception 5]

[Vitality 4]

[Magic power 3.5]

*Invariable Stats

[Intelligence - 4/10]

[Perseverance - 4/10]

[Luck - 4/10]

[Charm - 4/10]

▷Gift...???

▷Arts...???

...???

...???

...

...

...Supplement... Setting Chart...

===[Synchronizing... 70% Complete]===

“...What is this?”

This window on the monitor, this format, I recognized it. It was the format of my settings book. But without a doubt, I had never written or even thought of a setting like this.

This incomprehensible phenomenon made me sweat. My hands and feet trembled, and my heart began to pound.

This strange object, just who sent it to me, for what purpose, and for what reason?

At that moment...

The laptop screen turned off.

From the black laptop screen, a face was being reflected. It wasn't Kim Chundong's question mark, but my face, Kim Hajin's face.

Without giving me a chance to be shocked, the laptop turned back on and words began to appear on the laptop screen.

[Kim Chundong, synchronization with Kim Hajin complete.]

[All status reset.]

[Unique Authority, 'Setting Intervention', acquired.]

Chapter 5

Synchronization (2)

In this world, there was an awakening phenomenon called 'enlightenment.' Often called the first qualification to becoming a Hero, enlightenment was a form of personal insight said to occur when a person surpassed one's limits.

Active-duty Heroes were all enlightened. But because numerous experiences and training were required to reach enlightenment, most cadets had yet to experience enlightenment. Of course, there were exceptions like Kim Suho or Shin Jonghak. They were enlightened at the age of 15 and 17, respectively.

An enlightened person could see their Gift, skills, and abilities objectively, and thus train more efficiently. Furthermore, enlightenment allowed one to acquire 'clear rewards' from Towers and Dungeons.

The Hero Association called this phenomenon the 'status window.' It was an established fact that a status window could only be seen by its owner.

But because I liked exceptions, I also put in exceptions to this setting.

In place of one's eyes, one could use other sensory organs or other mediums such as a book or a weapon to see one's own status. Special enlightenment naturally came with special powers. Though it was a bit of a spoiler, the main character would undergo two enlightenments because of this setting.

"...Is this that?"

According to my setting, this laptop could be said to be a medium for enlightenment.

I began to grow a bit excited. No one hated being special.

But rather than being happy, analyzing the situation came first.

When I hit the Enter key on the keyboard, several windows popped up.

===[Synchronization Complete]===

===[Kim Chundong's status reset. Kim Hajin's status transferred.]===

===[All status reset. 10 Points acquired.]===

[Kim Hajin] [Current SP: 64]

▷Stats

*Variable Stats

[Strength 1.2]

[Stamina 1.3]

[Speed 1.5]

[Perception 2]

[Vitality 1.3]

[Magic power 1]

*Invariable Stats

[Intelligence – 4.105/10]

[Perseverance – 5.010/10]

[Luck – 6.330/10]

[Charm – 4.135/10]

Point: 10 (Will disappear in 10 days if not used)

▷Gift

「Observation and Reading」

[Null attribute]

—Observation

You can observe the characters in your vision

—Reading

Any time you want, you can read the laptop's settings book without a medium.

▷Arts (0/3)

X

▷Physique (0/3)

X

▷Setting Intervention [Authority]

—Using SP, you can modify or add settings to a non-living target.

—Using SP and relating to target 'Kim Hajin', you can modify or add settings to stats, Gift, Art, and Physique.

*Novice Consideration: Once only, you can write a Gift worth 10,000 SP free of cost.

*SP (Story Point): As Kim Hajin's importance increases in the world, you gain more SP. You can exchange Points with SP.

▷???

—Will be unlocked when the main story completes.

===

The first words to catch my attention were “synchronization” and “reset”.

I didn’t know what that meant, but I knew it was what changed my name from Kim Chundong to Kim Hajin and gave me my face back. My stats also seemed to have been adjusted appropriately.

Compared to Chundong, I was much weaker, but I obtained 10 spare Points as compensation. With Points, I should be able to raise the stats I want.

“...Points are really nice.”

As the world’s creator, I was well aware of the importance of Points. An average adult had 1.5 points in each stat. Furthermore, this world didn’t have a concept like leveling-up. So ‘Points’, which could raise one’s desired stats, were extremely rare and expensive, obtainable only from Towers or Dungeons.

Kim Suho’s current magic power stat should be around 9. In other words, if I put the 10 Points I had into raising my magic power, my magic power would come to surpass Kim Suho’s...

“No.”

That wasn’t the best plan. With only a stupidly high magic power, I would have to become a magician, but being a magician was exhausting. Not only was it expensive, it also required extreme effort and memorization. I would need to increase both intelligence and perseverance, but invariable stats couldn’t be raised even with Points. In other words, being a magician was out of the picture.

“...What’s up with the three question marks?”

The next line to catch my attention was obviously the suspicious question marks.

===

▷???

—Will be unlocked when the main story completes.

===

It was what caught my attention next after synchronization and reset.

Unlocked when the main story completes.

Perhaps, this was the key to going back. Even if it wasn't, it was the only clue I had.

The problem was that I didn't know when the main story would end. If it referred to the storyline before I went on hiatus, I would have to wait 10 years at the very least...

One thought led to another.

First, I had to find a way to go back home. To achieve that, I needed power or authority.

To achieve power or authority, I needed something called 'SP'. To obtain SP, I needed to get involved in the storyline. To do that, I needed to get stronger or stand out.

"...Gun. Looks like it wasn't such a bad choice."

A gun met both of these conditions.

First was power.

A gun didn't require high stats to be useful. Close ranged weapons like the spear or sword required equal distribution into all stats. While the importance of the stamina stat was less for a bow, the other stats were still necessary. On the other hand, speed, perception, and a tiny bit of magic power were enough to use a gun.

In other words, it was easier to meet the 'minimum strength' requirement with a gun.

The second was specialness.

No Hero in this world used a gun. That was more than enough to make me special.

So it seemed I should continue using the gun. At least, until my stats increased and I was mentally ready to fight monsters at close range.

With my main weapon decided, I could move on to the next topic.

Gift.

"...I can create my Gift."

A Gift held a special meaning for Heroes, but it still held on to its dictionary meaning.

The natural ability or talent for something.

But the standard for this ability was high. At the very least, a Gift had to be like a psychic ability.

Gifts were separated into many categories. The five most common were 'weapon',

‘physical’, ‘element’, ‘magic’, and ‘nature.’

As for the main character, he worthily had two Gifts. The Gift he currently awakened was the weapon class Gift, ‘Sword Saint’. It was a super cheaty Gift that gave him the world’s protection in regards to swords. Simply put, his sword could cut water. Just this single Gift was enough to make him the world’s greatest Hero.

That was how important Gifts were. It didn’t need to be complex. A stronger and more efficient Gift was better.

I began to type.

===

▷Gift

—Getting Stronger Every day

[Null attribute]

Every 24 hours, increase all stats by 0.1.

===

“...Will this work?”

Even I found it shameless. When I went on hiatus, Kim Suho’s strength stat was at 16. With this Gift, I would obtain 36.5 into all stats in just 365 days. But since it could be reverted before it saved, I gave it a go.

[Novice Consideration activated. A Gift worth 10,000 SP will be created.]
[10,000 SP is not enough to create this Gift. It’s quality decreases.]

===

▷ 「Getting Stronger Everyday」

[High-intermediate rank] [Spirit attribute] [Static]

—Cultivation Physique

Every 24 hours, increase all stats by 0.0015.

===

[Would you like to save the modified result?]

I immediately canceled.

1.5 into all stats in 1000 days. In 10,000 days, or 25 years, I would gain 25 into all stats, but I would be too old.

Next, I wrote down a Gift I thought of before.

===

▷Gift

「Master Sharpshooter」

[High-intermediate rank] [Null attribute]

Can wield long ranged weapons well.

===

I didn't put much detail into it. From my previous attempt, I realized what this laptop could do. No matter what I wrote, the laptop would modify it appropriately.

[Novice Consideration activated. A Gift worth 10,000 SP will be created.]

[10,000 SP is too much to create this Gift. It's quality increases.]

===

▷ 「Master Sharpshooter」

[High-intermediate rank] [Composite attribute] [Static]

—Master Sharpshooter's Training Method

*Unconditional proficiency in all long ranged weapons

—Thousand-Mile Eyes

*Can see farther away in more detail and accurately predict target's movement path.

*Increases perception and speed by 3.

—Bullet Time

*Once every 24 hours, you can spend 3 minutes in 'Bullet Time'.

===

“Oh?”

It was quite good. I especially liked that it applied to 'all long ranged weapons'. With this, I could use a bow if I wanted to. The Thousand-Mile Eyes seemed pretty self-explanatory, and Bullet Time probably increased my shooting speed or the like.

It was satisfactory, but there was still something I needed to change.

[Static]

Rather than a static Gift, which was a Gift that couldn't grow, a Gift that could get stronger was better.

[A phrase has been modified.]

===

▷ 「Master Sharpshooter」

[Low-intermediate rank] [Spirit attribute] [Evolving — Grade 10] [EXP 0%]

—Master Sharpshooter's Training

*Familiarity with all long ranged weapons

—Thousand-Mile Eyes

*Can see far away and somewhat predict target's movement path.

—Bullet Time

*In combat only and once every 24 hours, you can spend 3 seconds in 'Bullet Time'.

===

“Mm.”

It fell from high-intermediate rank to low-intermediate rank and the skills became weaker overall, but in the grand scheme of things, an evolving Gift was much better. Not to mention, the main story would continue for at least 7 years...

Ah, I'm getting sad again.

“Fuck.”

With a swear, I cleanly shook it off.

[Point 10]

Next, it was time to go back to stats.

How should I spend these 10 priceless Points?

Since invariable stats were 'invariable', I shouldn't be able to change them. In that case, I had to pick from variable stats.

However...

I might be able to modify invariable stats.

“...Should I exchange them for SP?”

Points could be exchanged with SP. Perhaps, it was possible to change invariable stats using SP.

But before making an irreversible mistake, I decided to give it a test. Thankfully, I had 64 SP, so I tried changing perseverance stat from 5.010 to 5.500.

[Using 64 SP, you modified an invariable stat.]

[You do not have enough SP. The value will be adjusted. Perseverance was changed to 5.060.]

“It worked?”

My eyes widened. If this worked, what I should do next was obvious. I had to convert my Points into SP and invest in invariable stats.

The question was which stat to choose...

Intelligence. Perseverance. Luck. Charm.

To be honest, as a man, the charm was extremely enticing.

“Luck it is.”

But I knew all too well how important the luck stat was in this world.

I remembered a line from my novel.

[Luck stat doesn't just affect the chances of finding treasures in Dungeons. It also affects chances of getting bonus stats from training, chances to land a critical strike from attacks, and even chances to win a lottery. It was the best stat that applied to all sorts of situations...

Life was like that. Luck was what mattered the most.]

Without hesitating any longer, I used 10 Points to gain 10,000 SP.

Using all 10,000 SP, I increased luck to its maximum.

What I wanted was [Luck — 10/10]

[You do not have enough SP. The value will be adjusted.]

The laptop rejected my ridiculous wish and returned a reasonable compromise.

[Luck — 9.100]

“9.1 is the highest I can go, huh.”

Since 9 was the limit for humans, 9.1 was extremely high.

But I didn't hit 'save' and canceled the modification.

Though it would take a bit longer, there was a more efficient method.

[Luck — 6.4/10]

First I raised my luck from 6.3 to 6.4 and saved. Next, to 6.5. Next, to 6.6, 6.7, 6.8...
Doing this repeatedly...

[A mysterious luck applies! Your luck stat further increases by 0.01!]

[A strange luck applies! Your luck stat further increases by 0.05!]

...

...

[Luck — 9.100/10]

With this method, I got my luck stat to reach 9.1 with just 9000 SP. I had saved 1000 SP.

For reference, the 'Great Sage' of this world had 9.5 intelligence stat. As 9 was the limit for 'normal' humans, spending the remaining 1000 SP was unlikely to increase my luck further.

In exchange, higher invariable stats had an exponential effect. But now, it was better to use the remaining SP elsewhere.

"Perseverance should be good."

In my current situation, training was key. But with my old mindset, I would never be able to digest Cube's training. I didn't even want to do 10 push-ups.

Without hesitation, I put in the remaining 1000 SP into perseverance.

I wrote, [Perseverance — 8/10]

[You do not have enough SP. The value will be adjusted.]

[Perseverance — 6.600]

Though I wasn't too satisfied, I hit save.

Effect of luck only applied after saving.

[An incredible luck applies!]

[Your perseverance stat increases from 6.600 to 7.207!]

"Wow."

Now I was satisfied. But I didn't feel any different. 4 was the standard for an average person. 7 should be at the level of a talented individual.

In any case, I was happy. As I increase my invariable stats whenever I gained SP, I was sure I would just as cheaty as the main character.

Immediately after I had such blissful thought...

[An error that could greatly affect the plot has been detected. From now on, invariable stats cannot be modified with SP.]

“...What’s this?”

A warning window popped up on the laptop screen, shutting down my plan for the future.

“Hm.”

Intervention by the world?

Though I was displeased, I had no other choice. Nothing would change even if I argued with the air. Plus, I was already full of luck, which was what I wanted.

“Whatever~”

Without much thought, I closed the laptop and got up with a grin.

Now, it was time to test the Gift I created.

Chapter 6

Synchronization (3)

In the middle of the night, I got out of my room. The handgun in my pocket rattled uncomfortably, but I couldn't do anything about it without a holster.

My destination was the shooting range.

Located east of dorm 1, the shooting range was a dome shaped building consisting of 20 training rooms. The targets were oddly distributed around where the sharpshooter would stand. This was because unlike bullets, magic arrows could easily change their trajectory.

[Rank 934, Kim Hajin, confirmed.]

When held my smartwatch against the shooting range's entrance, an unfamiliar robotic voice called my name. Indeed, my name had changed from Kim Chundong to Kim Hajin. Feeling a bit odd, I walked inside.

Past the wide circular lobby, there were ten doors evenly separated from each other. I held up my smartwatch against one of them.

[Rank 934, Kim Hajin, confirmed.]

The door opened.

The shooting range looked simple. At the center of the 130-square-meter circular space was a scaffolding for the shooter. I walked towards the center. When I placed my feet on the low scaffolding, a courteous robotic voice rang out from the ceiling.

[Initializing targets. Choose the number of targets you want.]

[You must choose at least 2 and can choose at most 20.]

"Ten."

My voice rang through, and insect-like blue objects popped up from the ground.

I looked at the targets surrounding me. A monster that was barely considered a monster, mole cricket. They were similar to mole crickets everyone knew, the only difference being that they were much bigger.

[Choose your training difficulty.]

[You can choose from stage 1 to stage 9.]

Higher level naturally meant targets moved quicker. At stage 9, the targets even attacked. Although the attacks should only sting at best, they were extremely dangerous to me.

“Stage 4.”

First, I set the difficulty to stage 4 and loaded my magic bullets. If I was skilled in handling magic power, I should be able to compress magic power into bullets without having to get physical bullets, but the current me didn't have such talents. And even if I could do such a thing, using a bow was much more destructive and efficient.

“Start.”

First, I notified the system to start and aimed my gun at the leftmost target. The slowly moving mole cricket seemed to have noticed my hostility as it began to speed up. It scuttled around without a set movement pattern, but I could see its trajectory. It was like I was seeing an afterimage, but of its future path.

Predicting its movement by a step, I pulled the trigger.

A blue flare shot up from the barrel. There was no loud noise like the guns from Earth. Leaving the barrel silently, the bullet should pierce the mole cricket.

I didn't bother to check the result with my eyes. The moment the bullet went out, I moved on to the next target and fired. My hand moved on its own.

One, two, three, four... ten.

The trigger was pulled ten times, and the mole crickets that were struck scattered into particles of mana.

Only two targets survived.

“Oho.”

I was quite impressed.

Just by writing a Gift, I managed to hit all the mole crickets other than the farthest two.

[Your training ended. Elapsed time: 1.37 seconds. Sharpshooting score: 80/100]

In just 1.37 seconds.

“...This is pretty fun.”

An eternal truth. The better you are at something, the more fun it is. It was fun because you were good at it.

Feeling like I was at an arcade, I shouted ‘start’ once more.



An eternal truth. No matter how fun something is, doing it twenty times makes it boring.

At about 3 A.M., I stopped my shooting practice. After getting out of the shooting room, I was relaxing my sore finger when I heard a noise next door.

—whoosh whoosh whoosh

The faint sound of shockwaves. It was the sound of arrows cutting through the air. The source was the room next door. Curious, I snuck a peek. I shouldn’t have been able to see anything because of the closed door, but I could see through it.

The door turned faint and the interior revealed itself.

The scene beyond the door was showing why bows were superior to guns.

“It’s Chae Nayun.”

Chae Nayun was target practicing with a serious face. Four arrows were sitting on her bow. They were magic arrows weaved with magic power. Because her magic power technique was currently lacking, she couldn’t perform ‘split shot’, which multiplied a single arrow into multidirectional shots.

—Whoosh!

Chae Nayun let go of the bowstring. Her arrows left behind a blue trace of magic power as they hurled towards the 20 targets. As though they were alive, her arrows obliterated the targets.

“...Amazing.”

I exclaimed in shock.

Still, Chae Nayun's real aptitude wasn't for bows. There was a weapon that suited her much more. But if she was already that amazing with a bow, just what kind of a setting did I make?

At that moment, Chae Nayun suddenly turned around. Her eyes met mine. Though there was no way she could see me through the wall, something still seemed odd.

I quickly escaped.

†

[Sharpshooting training increases your Gift's proficiency by 3%].

[Repeated sharpshooting training increases your Gift's proficiency by 2.9%]

['Luck' applies! Your perception and speed increase by 0.1!]

[Repeated sharpshooting training increases your Gift's proficiency by 2.8%]

...

...

The above messages were written on the laptop. Master Sharpshooter's proficiency shot up, and the stats I gained with luck were an added bonus.

Thanks to the Gift's grade being low, I had already gained 50% in proficiency EXP. Achieving grade 9 didn't seem to difficult.

===

▷ 「Master Sharpshooter」

[Low-intermediate rank] [Spirit attribute] [Evolving — Grade 10] [Proficiency EXP 50%]

—Master Sharpshooter's Training

*Familiarity with all long ranged weapons

—Thousand-Mile Eyes

*Can see far away and somewhat predict target's movement path.

—Bullet Time

*In combat only and once every 24 hours, you can spend 3 seconds in 'Bullet Time'.

===

The more I thought about it, the better this Gift seemed, especially in how it applied to 'all long ranged weapons'. Currently, it was easier to raise proficiency with a gun than a bow, but since a bow was stronger, I would have to switch to it eventually.

“But what's up with the SP?”

[You obtained 0.2 SP!]

[You obtained 0.2 SP!]

[An auspicious gift! You obtained 1 bonus SP.]

[You obtained 0.2 SP]

...

After practicing for twenty rounds, I only obtained 5 SP. Choosing a gun as my main weapon gave me 64 SP, meaning showing off and standing out gave more SP than quietly training.

“Tsk.”

Although I only received a tiny bit of SP, I still had a use for it.

The dreaded combat training was tomorrow. To obtain even the tiniest amount of points, I needed to make up for my lacking physical abilities.

The biggest problem was stamina. Because I threw all my points into luck, I was weaker than an ordinary person.

===

[Training Sneakers]

—Specially crafted sneakers.

*Adds 0.3 points into stamina and speed.

===

“Maybe with this...”

The easiest way to fix my problem was with equipment.

I began to tap on the keyboard.

===

[Mystical Training Sneakers]

—Specially crafted sneakers. Contains a mystical power.

*Adds 0.3 points into stamina and speed.

*Enhances energy and stamina recovery.

===

[You do not have enough SP.]

But this time, the modification I made was canceled without being adjusted.
I wasn't too surprised. After all, I only had 5 SP.
But it was still too early to give up.

===

[Mystical Training Sneakers]

—Specially crafted sneakers. Contains a mystical power.

*Adds 0.3 points into stamina and speed.

*When the wearer desires, energy and stamina recovery is enhanced for 1 hour. After use, this effect cannot be used again for 24 hours. This 'effect' disappears after one month.

===

To save SP, I put a total of three restrictions. A 24 hour cooldown time, one-hour effect duration, and effect dissipation after one month.

[You used 5 SP. Would you like to save?]

“Oh! It worked!”

I hit the Enter key ecstatically.

Immediately, a blue light flashed from the laptop. The dancing light melted into the sneakers, and a streak of color was branded onto the white sneakers.

Chapter 7

Combat Training (1)

‘Outcall’ – a magic power explosion that occurred 50 years ago and shook the world. Following this event, mysterious entities like Towers, Dungeons, and monsters began to appear in the world. These existences of chaos shook the very foundation of humanity. The blue planet of humans turned into hell. Monsters devoured humans, and Towers and Dungeons ceaselessly produced monsters like factories.

In front of these newfound calamities, humanity’s science and technology lost their meaning. Society collapsed and the rule of law returned to the law of the jungle. Survivors of the tragedy crumbled to their instincts, losing the virtues that made them human.

Within this hellfire, Heroes emerged shining stars.

With transcendental powers, they corrected the chaos. The world was reconstructed just as quickly as it collapsed. Using Gifts bestowed by heaven, they brought about miracles with a flicker of their hands. With their help, humanity recovered their lost virtue, joining the Heroes with revitalized technology and science. ‘Magic science’ and ‘magic engineering’ was thus born.

...

Eventually, Towers, Dungeons, and monsters were all designated as targets to be destroyed. However, the differences among them were great.

Towers required many people and a long period of time to be conquered. On the other hand, depending on their difficulty, Dungeons could be conquered by a single person, so long as he knew its location.

Towers gave better rewards, containing treasures that humans had never dreamed of.

Then what was the name of the Tower conquered by the guild Apostle of Saints on August 17th, 2023, and what was its reward?

“Minor questions like these don’t come up often, but you should still know about

conquests of Towers and Dungeons.”

Morning class was ‘Post-Outcall History.’ The few sentences I had written had turned into a 400-page textbook. Things to remember were rewards from Towers, names of monsters, locations of Dungeons in Korea, conquerors of Towers and Dungeons, and countless others.

Even as the author, there was too much information to process. Thankfully, it didn’t pose much of a problem for me, all thanks to my gift ‘Observation and Reading.’

[On August 17th, 2023, the Apostle of Saints conquered the Tower of Floods and obtained an ocean stone.]

Whenever I looked at something, I could get the information about it, so I had nothing to worry about.

“Huu...”

On the other hand, the girl sitting in front of me scratched her head and sighed.

Looking at the character I made, I couldn’t help but laugh.

Chae Nayun hated studying. She had the ability to take the number one spot among female cadets, but because written exams were holding her down, she had to give up the first place seat to Rachel. Even if she gnashed her teeth in mortifying defeat, written exams were still too much of a hurdle for her.

At that moment, Chae Nayun turned her head halfway towards me. Her curt eyes glared at the person sitting behind her – me. She must have heard my laughter. After all, Sharpshooters had keen senses.

I pretended to be calm as I lowered my head and focused on taking notes. Chae Nayun clicked her tongue and faced back front.

The lesson continued.

Places with high mana density, monster behavior, Djinn on the wanted list...

The bell rang only after two hours had passed.

“Make sure to go back and read the notes you took today. Otherwise, you’ll cry on the exam.”

The grey-haired professor wearing round eyeglasses left with those words.

“Argh, so annoying, why do I have to learn all this? Written exams are so annoying.”

Chae Nayun began to complain the moment the professor left. However, her face was full of smiles. It was most likely because of the next class.

Anti-monster combat training.

Just like its name suggested, it was combat training against monsters. The monsters used in the lesson were mana puppets, but their appearance and destructive power were faithful to the real thing. Of course, they were weaker than their real counterparts, but there was a high chance of getting injured.

I was scared.

“We’re meeting at the field in 20 minutes!”

A loud voice rang out in the classroom. I turned towards the voice.

Oval face, small gentle eyes, and a muscular body that didn’t match his face. It was Kim Suho’s supporter, Yi Yeonghan. Knowing the conflict between Kim Suho and Shin Jonghak, the instructor in charge of the classroom chose Yi Yeonghan to be the class president.

“Ehew.”

I just hoped it wouldn’t hurt.

†

After a 20 minute break, everyone from the Veritas class gathered at the Novice Field. With 100 people here, it seemed quite crowded. The cadets were sharing their half-nervous half-excited expectations with their friends, but I was alone. Only I was alone.

“Fuck...”

While I was wallowing in loneliness, the instructor, Kim Soohyuk, showed up. The cadets immediately stood in ten columns in front of him.

“I’m sure you all know what this lesson is about, so I’ll announce the teams without

explanation. Unless something special happens, this team will be the same until after the midterms.”

Team formation. The cadets grew restless at the exciting yet nerve-wracking process.

A team generally consisted of five members – two warriors, one sharpshooter, one supporter, and one utility player. Warriors were usually close range combatant like spearman or swordsman, sharpshooters were the long ranged attacker, and supporters were people like Yoo Yeonha and Yi Yeonghan who attacked themselves or supported the main attackers.

Finally, the utility player was generally the magician’s position, so it was excluded until the first year ended. When a magician was added, the supporter would have an additional role in protecting the magician. After all, magicians were important.

My role here was a bit iffy. Roles were assigned based on the main weapon we chose, and while I wasn’t a warrior, I was too lacking to be a sharpshooter. Guns had a much shorter range than bows, and guns were weaker compared to melee weapons that could attack from afar.

[Sharpshooter (long range) — Rank 4 Chae Nayun, Rank 9 Im Yeongjin... Rank 934 Kim Hajin, Rank 945 Oh Jiyun]

In any case, it seemed I was assigned as a sharpshooter.

Kim Soohyuk announced.

“Team members will be selected fairly. Lower ranked cadets will be paired with higher ranked cadets.”

Cube’s training classes were administered by the artificial intelligence developed by the Great Sage. As a result, there was no room for corruption or persuasion.

I could see the pitiful result with my own eyes.

[Team 1]

[Kim Suho / Kim Lang]

[Sung Seung-Un / Paine]

[Team 2]

[Demian / Rosen]

[Chun Lee / Chae Nayun]

...

...

[Team 5]

[Jin Hoseung / Hazuki]

[Kim Hajin / Yoo Yeonha]

“...”

Looking at my assigned team, I became lost for words.

Yoo Yeonha.

Yoo Yeonha was on my team. In my novel, she was one of the most loved and hated character.

Looking around, I met her eyes. Her jewel-like eyes flashed with deep contempt and disdain. But that was only for a moment. By the time I blinked once, the negative feeling in her eyes was gone.

Surprisingly, she walked towards me with a smile. Her long hair fluttered with each of her dignified steps. Her beautiful lips moved modestly.

“It’s nice to meet you.”

“Ah, um, I...”

“Hoseung-ssi.”

But I wasn’t the one Yoo Yeonha greeted. Meeting her eye was also my imagination. She was talking to the guy standing behind me.

“Ah, hello.”

“Weren’t we on the same team before?”

She talked too politely for a 17-year-old, but that was how Yoo Yeonha liked to keep her distance.

“Yes? Ah, right, haha.”

After exchanging just two sentences, Jin Hoseung broke out in a cold sweat. Yoo Yeonha was difficult to talk to, and it wasn't just because of her background and insane personality. Yoo Yeonha and Shin Jonghak were a couple officially, but not unofficially. At this point, it should be more like a one-sided crush from Yoo Yeonha.

“Ah, Hazuki-ssi is coming too.”

“Hello...”

Like his name suggested, Hazuki was a Japanese cadet. She walked over with eyes that looked like she was about to cry. Yoo Yeonha glanced at her slightly displeased, then spoke.

“Who's the other person?”

“It's me.”

Yoo Yeonha didn't like people who lacked confidence and self-esteem. As such, I stepped up confidently. Hazuki and Jin Hoseung turned towards me first.

“Uh...”

Hazuki tilted her head as though she didn't know who I was.

“Ah, the guy who chose a gun.”

When Jin Hoseung mentioned my previous feat, I checked Yoo Yeonha's expression. Unexpectedly, she didn't show any emotion. But that was even more frightening. At that moment, Kim Soohyuk shouted loudly.

“There's no time for chitchat. You should have gotten the coordinate and information of the monster you'll need to kill on your smartwatch. Get going!”

A total of 25 teams. Including the other classes that joined in, there was a total of 100 teams.

Our mission was to head to the coordinate given to us and kill the monster there.

We were then ranked based on how quickly and how safely we completed our mission.

Wiing—

As soon as the instructor's voice rang out, Yoo Yeonha projected her smartwatch to the air.

[Blackhump Octopus 37° 31' 32" N]

The monster's name and coordinate were written there.
Yoo Yeonha spoke tersely.

"Let's go. We can talk while we're moving."



I was running through a field. Beyond this ocean of golden reeds should be the black hump octopus.

But running was extremely difficult due to my horrible physical stats. The sneakers I made last night seemed useless. Its one-hour duration had not run out, but my stamina had already bottomed out.

In the end, I fell down while running, and the team stopped because of me.

"It's fine. What matters is whether or not we can kill the monster."

Seeing me gasping for breath on the ground, Jin Hoseung said as he handed me a bottle of water.

"He's right. Apparently, this is common when you work with magicians."

Hazuki also consoled me with her mediocre Korean.

I was thankful, but I was checking for Yoo Yeonha's reaction the most.

Contrary to my expectations, she didn't seem too displeased. She was simply sitting modestly on the ground, reading information about the black hump octopus on her watch.

I also pulled up the necessary information from my head.

===

[Blackhump Octopus]

—low-intermediate rank monster

—Special features

*The main body isn't strong, but numerous baby octopuses pop out from the hump on its head. As dozens pop out at once, it isn't easy to deal with them. Baby octopuses can suck human blood and turn them into mummies in just one second. They are classified as low rank monsters.

—Strategy

*Eliminate all baby octopuses. Alternatively, destroy the black hump where the main body's magic power is created.

—Weakness

*Black hump

—Strength

*Suction cups and baby octopuses

===

Perhaps because I was the one who wrote the setting for the black hump octopus, a thorough information on the monster came out.

"I'll deal with the babies while you two take care of the main body."

Soon, Yoo Yeonha turned off her smartwatch and said to Hazuki and Jin Haseung.

Ah, I get it now.

Yoo Yeonha was acting like I didn't exist. I was at the same level as air, which was why she didn't reprimand me or seem displeased.

"...Let's go now."

Offended by her treatment, I forced myself to get up. Thanks to my sneakers, my stamina had recovered.

"Are you sure?"

"Yeah. I'll go first. Hup!"

I ran ahead of them. Compared to when I was on Earth, I was much quicker.

But exactly 10 seconds later.

I found myself far behind the other three.

Chapter 8

Combat Training (2)

“There.”

Right when my legs were about to give out, we found our target monster. A giant octopus running amok near the beach. There was a black hump on its back that made it seem as though it had two heads.

“I’m ready.”

Yoo Yeonha spoke as she lowered her body in the thicket. Jin Hoseung and Hazuki took out their sword and axe, respectively.

“When we run at it, baby octopuses will pop out of its hump. When that happens, the two of you should fall back and be on standby until I kill them all. Warriors need to save their magic power as much as possible. Black hump octopuses have high regenerative power, so we need to remove its hump in a single blow...”

Yoo Yeonha’s explanation continued.

In reality, it was best to leave the baby octopuses to me. A handgun had a high base power, so it could kill any number of baby octopuses in one blow. On the other hand, it was hard to damage the main body unless a critical hit occurred.

However, Yoo Yeonha didn’t say anything to me.

So I just stood still, holding myself back from yawning.

“Then let’s start.”

The moment her words fell, Jin Hoseung and Hazuki ran up. After closing in a fair amount, Jin Hoseung straightened his throat before roaring.

“Kueeeek!”

“Kyak!”

My ears felt burning, but it had the desired effect. The back hump octopus lowered its head after discovering us. It then pointed its cannon-shaped hump towards us.

BOOM!

A thundering sound rang out, and dozens of creatures shot out of its hump. Seemingly mushy lumps rained down on us from the sky.

As planned, Jin Hoseung and Hazuki stepped aside, while Yoo Yeonha held up her whip, clearly coursing with magic power.

But I held up my handgun before Yoo Yeonha could make her move.

“Hey, you don’t have to...”

Yoo Yeonha tried to stop me in shock, but I ignored her.

Now was the only time I could shine.

I activated Bullet Time.

Immediately, the blood in my body began to boil. My vision became clearer and the world slowed down. I could see and predict the trajectory of the raining octopuses. Their one-dimensional movement made them much easier targets than the mole crickets.

There were twenty magic bullets loaded.

It was simple. I just had to look where I was shooting and pull the trigger. The added luck was the icing on the cake.

Magic bullets silently cut through the air, leaving behind a blue trace. One bullet for one target. The clip was emptied in an instant, but unloading and reloading were also instantaneous.

I shot another twenty bullets, then another twenty.

After I shot 60 bullets nonstop, the world returned to normal.

“...Huh?”

The creatures covering the sun disappeared without leaving behind a trace. The sudden change made Yoo Yeonha and the others confused.

“C-Come on. Let’s go.”

“Ah, right.”

“Yes!”

Quickly snapping out of her daze, Yoo Yeonha rebuked Hazuki and Jin Hoseung. Only then did the two warriors begin to run at the main body. Yoo Yeonha's long whip shot out and grabbed onto the giant octopus's hump.

The moment her elegant whip crushed the octopus's hump, a mole cricket shot out from the ground

Kieeek—

Crying voraciously, the mole cricket jumped on Yoo Yeonha. I fired the last bullet I had in my barrel. Hitting the mole cricket on the mark, the magic bullet detonated inside and splashed the mole cricket's blood and mucus on Yoo Yeonha.

Before she was covered in goo, Yoo Yeonha calmly spread out her magic power. The mucus from the mole cricket fell down after hitting this barrier.

“Uk...”

But she couldn't block everything. Yoo Yeonha gave me a deathly glare, but she knew now wasn't the time to complain. She shot out whip towards the octopus once again. A beast-like whip then joined the sword and axe's dance with tentacles.

†

Case closed. Time elapsed: 9 minutes 40 seconds.

Yoo Yeonha had brilliantly cut off four of the eight tentacles. All that while standing next to me and not moving more than a foot. She had thoroughly fulfilled her two duties — supporting the warriors and protecting the sharpshooter.

“...”

Now that the battle was over, Yoo Yeonha had her eyes closed shut.

Around her ankles and snow-white collarbone were the mole cricket's dried blood and mucus. After letting out a sigh, she took out a handkerchief from her pocket and wiped them off.

Then, she turned towards me.

“Excuse me.”

Her eyes were smiling, but it didn't seem so friendly. I met her eyes without being able to answer. The anger hidden in her eyes were like blades. Yoo Yeonha was a fearsome woman. More so than anything else, she hated her body and clothes getting dirty.

“You didn’t need to bother. I can take care of a mole cricket just fine. Much cleanly.”

“ ... ”

“Because of you, my clothes ended up getting dirty.”

At that moment, two insensitive warriors approached me.

“Whew, that was swift thanks to you. I saw it. You killed the baby octopuses, right? Guns have their advantage, huh.”

“That was amazing!”

It was Jin Hoseung and Hazuki, who were covered in blood and ink. Seemingly afraid to get her clothes dirty, Yoo Yeonha slowly stepped away.



[Team 5 — Total time: 58 minutes 58 seconds. 16/100]

16th out of 100 teams.

Though she finished in the upper half of the teams, Yoo Yeonha’s expression couldn’t be said to be good.

But since grades were based on individual performance filmed through drones, she didn’t mind too much. Understandably, Kim Suho and Shin Jonghak’s teams took first and second place respectively. But she was bitter that Chae Nayun’s team came in higher.

“Drones filmed everything. They’ll be sent to your smartwatches, so why you were quick or slow to hunt your monster, your team’s compatibility with the monster, and how you could improve for next time. It’ll be part of your grades.”

Kim Soohyuk gave a long-winded statement. Yoo Yeonha slightly turned her head and looked behind her. A dull looking man was yawning in a daze.

It was entirely his fault that her team came in late. Because he lacked stamina, they couldn’t reach the monster quickly. What should have taken just 10 minutes ended up taking 50 minutes.

But it was also thanks to him that they managed to end up 16th. His quick bullet serenade eliminated all the baby octopuses in 3 seconds. Since Yoo Yeonha was prepared to scuffle with them for 15 minutes, it could be said that he played a big role. But of course, she still played the biggest role as she was the one who crushed the main body's hump.

“...”

Yoo Yeonha held back her impulse to blame someone. But that only increased the unreasonable sense of jealousy and envy she felt towards Chae Nayun. She faced forward and glared at Chae Nayun's head. If she wouldn't be found out, she wanted to smack the back of her head.

Yoo Yeonha's hands trembled, reaching towards Chae Nayun's head.

But instead of taking such extreme action, she lightly touched Chae Nayun's shoulder.

“Nayun, how was it?”

“Hm? Ah, it's as you see. 4th place. What a shame. I wanted to beat Shin Jonghak and Rachel. What about you?”

“I'm... 16th.”

“Oh? Wow, you got 16th with that gun using sharpshooter?”

“We got the black hump octopus. We just had to remove the hump.”

“And that's what you did, right?”

Yoo Yeonha nodded with a bright smile.

“Yep.”



Late at night, after the end of regular classes, I was working out in the training room. Because I just came back from running, I felt like I was dying. But it was something I needed to do, I focused on working out for 3 hours. Thankfully, the training equipment wasn't too different from Earth's. It was only that the weights were heavier. For example, the leg extension machine went from 15 kg to 500 kg.

“Ugh.”

After completing my workout, I fumbled back to the dressing room like a zombie and collapsed on the seat. After collecting my breath for five minutes, I took out my laptop and a fatigue recovery drink from my bag.

First, I checked today’s results with the laptop.

[Luck applies! As the enemy is only a low-rank monster, your accuracy increases greatly!]

[All attacks hit their mark! Your Gift’s proficiency increases by 20%!]

[Perception increases by 0.03.]

[Luck applies! Your eyes and ears seem to work better!]

[You gain 27 SP.]

As expected, I seemed to have gotten lucky with the accuracy I showed during today’s combat training. And thanks to standing out to Yoo Yeonha, I gained some SP too.

[Through working out, your strength increases by 0.02.]

[Through working out, your stamina increases by 0.02.]

[Through working out, your vitality increases by 0.02.]

[Mana mysteriously melts into your torn muscle fibers! Your strength, stamina, and vitality increase by 0.03!]

The amount of stats I got from working out was more than I expected. Something like this would have been impossible on Earth. Enlightenment and luck must have played a part.

But with the sharp pain all over my body, I wasn’t sure I could even get up tomorrow. Of course, I already had a solution in mind.

===

[Fatigue Recovery Drink]

—Restores the body from fatigue. Contains a tiny amount of temperate mana.

*Current SP: 36

===

This was a fatigue recovery drink provided by Cube.

I planned on modifying its effect.

Of course, something like ‘completely restores the body from fatigue’ was unlikely to work. Even if it did, it would be a waste to use up all my SP. But with the right amount of restrictions, I could come up with a decent product.

I added one line to the fatigue recovery drink’s description.

—If ‘Kim Hajin’ goes to sleep within 2 hours of use, he will slowly recover from physical fatigue over the course of 8 hours.

I put in four restrictions.

Only Kim Hajin.

Sleeping within 2 hours of use.

Physical fatigue only.

Non-instantaneous recovery, but slowly over the course of 8 hours.

[You can save the modified setting using 0.5 SP.]

Because the drink already had a similar effect, the amount of SP required was exactly the amount I gained from working out. After saving the modified effect, I gulped down the drink.

“Bulp.”

Now, I had to go back and sleep.

Otherwise, the drink would have been a waste.

“Agh, my joints.”

I staggered forward like a zombie.



At the same hour, Yoo Yeonha was analyzing the video from the day’s combat training. With several drones filming each team, she could see the battle from multiple angles.

“...At least he’s quick.”

The more she saw it, the more curious she got.

The black hump octopus fired a total of 59 babies. But before they could even touch

the ground, they were eliminated by the sharpshooter's bullets. Black hump octopuses usually reabsorbed the babies they shot out to recover their energy. Then, they'd shoot more out from their hump. Because of this annoying trait, Yoo Yeonha was ready for a drawn-out battle, but the actual fight had ended in just 10 minutes.

"I don't remember seeing him in Agent Military Academy."

The more she thought about it, the stranger this sharpshooter seemed. His stamina was abnormally lower than other cadets, and he had also suddenly changed his weapon...

That was as far as Yoo Yeonha got on her notes about Kim Hajin. She received a sudden message.

[What's up?]

It was Shin Jonghak. With a grin, Yoo Yeonha tapped on the hologram keyboard.

[Analyzing the video from today~]

[Why are you doing that now?]

[I'm going to inherit a guild in the future, so I have to look for promising talents.]

[There are none in your team. They're all trash.]

Yoo Yeonha snickered. He was right, but also arrogant. If it was anyone other than Shin Jonghak, she would've found such behavior detestable. But just the fact that he was 'Shin Jonghak' turned his arrogance and impertinence into chicness. It wasn't a logical explanation, but the reason Yoo Yeonha liked Shin Jonghak was far from logical in the first place.

[How's that gun shooting guy?]

"Haha."

So he was curious after all. He had a pretty cute side to him as well.

[He's okay. He did a man's worth of work. Exactly what you'd expect from rank 934.]

2.78 seconds. In that short amount of time, that man had shot 60 bullets and hit 59. Yoo Yeonha made a pulling motion with her index finger. Was it possible to pull the trigger 20 times in a second? Or did that handgun have an automatic firing button?

Ding dong—

In the middle of her thinking, the bell rang.

[Ah, my room service is here.]

Yoo Yeonha hopped towards the door.

Opening the door, she saw her neatly dressed butler waiting in front. She was happy to see the butler her father picked out for her.

“Thank you, Sechan-ssi.”

The butler bowed respectfully.

Yoo Yeonha took her food and came back to her seat.

[I’m back. Were you waiting?]

Yoo Yeonha opened the dome-shaped lid on her elegant silver platter.

[No.]

In it were plain food. A patty between two buns, the iconic symbol of commoners. On the side were french fries and a bottle of coke.

It was a hamburger set.

First, she munched on a fry.

[What did you order?]

Shin Jonghak asked just at the right time.

Yoo Yeonha replied casually.

[Just the usual. A little bit of foie gras entier.]

Chapter 9

Within Everyday Life (1)

Wednesday's first class, 'anti-personnel training.'

This two-hour-long class simply had two cadets form a pair and spar each other. Spars were done with training weapons, making the fight less painful and easier to grade. In this class, Kim Suho paired with Yi Yeonghan, and Shin Jonghak paired with Kim Horak.

"Uwooooh."

"Rank 934 Kim Hajin, get up!"

"I, I can't."

As for me, I was scuffling with the anti-personnel combat instructor rather than a cadet.

It was because there wasn't a gun for training. Since a real gun couldn't be used in sparring for fear of unintentional injuries, I was stuck fighting the instructor.

"What do you mean you can't!?"

The female instructor ordered me to give my all.

Exactly one minute later, it was the instructor who was giving her all. It seemed my 'Gift' was more threatening than she had anticipated.

"Get up!"

Seeing my bullet slightly scratch her forearm, she got angry and grabbed me by the collar.

Now that things had come to this, I regretted spending my first two weeks in this world loafing around. I should've spent the time working out.

"I can't continue."

“Yes, you can!”

“My body won’t move.”

“It will!”

The instructor forcefully pulled me up.

“Put up your guard and do something!”

She was telling me to do something, but the handgun in my hand felt heavy. I pulled the trigger half-heartedly. The instructor blocked the bullet with her hand. Then, she tackled me. Unable to resist, I stumbled and fell. An electrifying feeling coursed through my body.

“I give up, I give up.”

“You didn’t move after shooting. I said do something!”

Chak! She slapped my face.

“GET UP!”

Chak! I was starting to get annoyed. Come to think of it, isn’t this woman younger than me?

“I said, GET UP!”

I refused to take it a third time. I grabbed her arm just barely, then...

“You fucker.”

I bit the instructor’s hair with my teeth.

“Ah! What are you doing!? 934... Ak! Let go! Let go! Let go!”

Gnashing on her hair, I pulled back as though my life depended on it. My strange actions turned the surroundings silent, but I didn’t have the time to pay attention to something like that.

“T-This is a warning! Let go! I said, LET GO!”

This hair, I'll bite it off. I swear I'll bite it off.

“Y-You...!”

I could see the instructor's fist in front of my eyes.

I had no memories of what happened next.

But since I managed to gain 40 SP out of it, it didn't feel like such a bad trade.



Cube had 'clubs'.

The head instructor Kim Soohyuk told us we wouldn't be able to enjoy our youths, but I didn't set Cube to be such a horrible place. While it was normal to be covered in monsters' blood or to kill Djinnns from time to time, Cube encouraged cadets to enjoy their hobbies for their mental health. Being in a relationship was technically prohibited, but it was tacitly allowed by all of the faculty.

Cube's clubs were no different than college circles. Club promotions happened in the second week after first-year cadets came in.

I set the number of clubs in my novel to be about a hundred, but considering there were only 5000 cadets in the whole school, it might not have been the most realistic. In any case, there was a club for pretty much any topic. There were hobby-like clubs like bowling, pool, and VR, while there were also academic clubs like studying, martial arts, and training.

I planned to join more than one club.

Obviously, the purpose to stay close to the main characters.

I already knew who was in which club.

Kim Suho and Yi Yeonghan were in traveling, Chae Nayun was in traveling and hunting, Yoo Yeonha was in traveling and academics, Shin Jonghak wasn't in any, and Rachel was in reading.

Clearly, traveling club was an obvious choice. Next, I had to choose from the hunting club, reading club, and the academics club.

As students could join multiple clubs, I could join all four if I wanted to.

But that was too difficult realistically. I only had one body to work with.

Among these, the easiest club to gain SP from seemed to be the academic club. And of the academic clubs, the academic circle called Veritas had an antagonist that played an important role early in the story.

“VR club, Folklore Village... Interesting.”

Suddenly, I got a strange feeling.

Sitting on a bench in Cube’s Hero Park, I looked around. Likely because all classes had ended, the park was bustling with people.

It all felt too mysterious. The setting I had scribbled down had taken a life of its own, filling up missing holes and creating this world. There were many things that were new to me. The VR club I mentioned was one of them, and so was that couple secretly making out behind the bushes.

“Ehew, that’s a bit...”

Seeing them starting to get touchy, I got up with a frown.

Afterward, I ran around busily, collecting club application forms from the park. Four forms. I didn’t get a favorable look when I received them, but I had succeeded nonetheless.

“I’ll need to join the traveling club for sure.”

Four leading characters were in the traveling club. It was the result of me wanting to tie them together for major and minor events.

But compared to the club’s importance in the storyline, it wasn’t popular among students. It only had 20 people from all three grades, and third years were mostly busy interviewing with guilds and internship missions. Realistically, the club only had about 14 people.

I couldn’t explain why. That was just how I set it because having more people seemed troublesome.

In any case, traveling club was confirmed. After thinking about the others, I decided to join just two more. Setting the reading club aside, I chose the hunting club and the academics club.

Clubs began after all classes ended, and these three clubs didn’t overlap at all. The academic club met on Tuesdays, hunting on Thursdays, and traveling was either Saturday or Sunday.

Rachel ended up being left out, but she was an untouchable existence for now anyways.

“Okay.”

Thwack.

After flicking the application papers with my fingers, I stood up. Now, it was time to receive even more obscure gazes from club leaders.

†

The capital of Korea, Seoul, was filled with guilds that vied for the world’s top position. Distinguished guilds such as ‘Essence of the Strait’, ‘Desolate Moon’, and ‘Frost Sanctuary’ were located in the collectively established guild district in Seoul, making it the center for Djinn and monster subjugation requests, technological advances, and businesses.

“The guild visit is set for the Friday two weeks later.”

Seoul’s guild district was filled with skyscrapers. But one especially brilliant building wasn’t so tall. The geometric design of this building grabbed any passerby’s attention. It was the building belonging to the guild ‘Creator’s Sacred Grace’.

With cutting-edge magic engineering technology, the inside of the building was twice as large as it looked from the outside, while its mana density was always maintained above grade 3.

“Mm, understood.”

In this environment optimal for even Heroes, the vice-leader Yun Seung-Ah took her secretary’s report.

Currently, Yun Seung-Ah’s attention was solely devoted to finding ‘promising talents’. It was a widely acknowledged fact that Cube’s freshman this year were exceptional. It was said that some had Gifts that could alter the guilds’ rankings. If she were to let her competitors steal them, the first place position she’d worked so hard to get would be jeopardized.

Consequently, Yun Seung-Ah’s eyes were glued to the guild’s intranet database, which contained videos from Cube’s 1st combat training.

“Kim Suho really is something.”

Currently on her screen was the combat training’s 1st place finisher, Kim Suho. Fighting against a monster, his sword qi stood sharply. But his sword qi wasn’t the only awe-striking scene. His sword’s fluid movements made it look like his sword was water. His swordsmanship didn’t resemble anyone else’s, almost like a formless sword technique. With this technique, he seemed to tear apart space along with his target monster.

“Yes, he doesn’t seem close to any guilds either. He is first on our priority.”

“I want to bring him in no matter what... Oh? Someone’s using a gun?”

Kim Suho’s video ended, and Yun Seung-Ah’s eyes scanning the remaining list shined in curiosity.

“Yes. There were talks about it in the guild community.”

“Was there? Sorry, I’ve been too busy lately.”

“It was uploaded from the Cube community. He was in Yoo Yeonha’s team, which was why it gathered so many views in the first place. According to inside information, he’s quite the strange one.”

“Mm... strange one, huh?”

Curious about this unique individual, Yun Seung-Ah played the video.

[Team 5]

[Jin Hoseung, Hazuki, Yoo Yeonha, Kim Hajin]

Though not to the point of awe, the 10-minute video most certainly drew her attention.

“He wasn’t using an automatic rifle and still managed to fire 60 shots in 2.78 seconds?”

It was physically impossible. Even if you were quick enough to pull the trigger 60 times, the gun wouldn’t be able to endure it. In other words, a trans-physical power was at play.

“Yes. It seems he changed his weapon from a sword to a gun as soon as he entered Cube.”

“...Enlightenment.”

“I think so too.”

Enlightenment at just 17 years old... Leaning back, Yun Seung-Ah fell in deep contemplation.

Changing one’s weapon after going through enlightenment.

Though rare, it happened.

Gifts presented cadets with individuality, but before enlightenment, it was impossible to know exactly what one’s Gift was. In cases like this, where one has to change to an unfamiliar weapon, one needed three years to catch back up.

This was also why Cube’s lower academy, the Agent Military Academy, encouraged cadets to use a variety of weapons. Knowing how to wield several weapons made it easier to transition from one weapon to another weapon should it be necessary.

“He experienced enlightenment early, but if using a gun is all his Gift can do, I can’t say it’s too desirable.”

“Right, if his Gift could be used with a bow, he would have chosen a bow.”

Yun Seung-Ah agreed, but being enlightened at the age of 17 was still a rare occurrence.

“We should at least keep an eye on him. Is there a free recruiter?”

“No. Because of how exceptional this year’s cadets are, everyone is at their limit.”

Yun Seung-Ah hesitated. Nowadays, recruiters were expensive. Even if she hired a new recruiter, without attachment to the guild, they could simply run away to another guild with the guild’s information.

“...Then let him be. If he really is special, I’m sure he’ll stand out again.”

At that decision, her secretary nodded without objection.

Chapter 10

Within Everyday Life (2)

I needed to make money. It wasn't a hopeful wish, but a necessity. When I looked at the bill that came to my room, I almost lost consciousness. I had a 300 million won debt. In other words, I had taken out all the loan a Cube cadet could get. It had to be Chundong's doing.

The loan only had a low 1% yearly interest, but as I wasn't making any money, I was simply losing money. Unfortunately, the bank account Chundong left behind only contained 3 million won. It was nowhere near the amount needed to live in this world, where power and money was everything.

Thankfully, there were multiple ways I could become rich.

First was the stock market. Towers and Dungeons were constantly being created in the world. I knew the names of guilds that would discover or conquer them. Guilds in this world were treated like companies, so one could buy stocks of public guilds from the guild stock market.

Today was March 2nd, 2025. My settings book should be full of juicy information. I opened my laptop.

▷Settings List

[March 15th, 2025. Newly found guild, 'Packhorse Master,' goes public. July 4th, 2025, they conquer the Dungeon, 'Suwon Royal Devil's Nest.]

In reality, the Packhorse Master guild was established by Djinnns. Because they would play an important role in the story, I made sure to note them down in the settings book. Conquering Suwon Royal Devil's Nest would skyrocket their stock prices by a 1000%. It wouldn't be until three years later when they were discovered that they would be delisted.

[December 8th, 2025. Guild, 'Creator's Sacred Grace,' announces its plan to conquer

‘Tower of Miracle.’]

This incident would become the lowest point for the currently ranked 1 Creator’s Sacred Grace. It was also the decisive event that made Yun Seung-Ah become its leader. This plan, which Yun Seung-Ah opposed, would bring their rank down to 7.

I had two opportunities to make money with this incident.

First was before the plan is announced, and second was before the plan failed.

Without having to know much information, with just these two — though, these two were the only early financial incidents written down in the settings book — I could make a fortune.

“The problem is...”

I didn’t have any money to work with.

“Do I need to go out to the Field?”

Field referred to danger zones where monsters appeared. Unlike Towers and Dungeons, the danger level of Fields was vastly dependent on their grade, so one didn’t need permits to enter the less dangerous ones.

I should be able to enter the Field in Gangwondo.

“Wait.”

I remembered something about Gangwondo. There was a setting I arranged in Gangwondo. I wonder what it was.

Using CTRL+F, I searched for a specific word.

[Year 2026. Djinn, Tomer, discovers Aether from Gangwondo’s Gari Mountain Dungeon.]

Found it. Mystic grade formless weapon, Aether.

I wanted to take it for myself, but without Aether, Tomer would be left without a weapon. Not to mention, Tomer was an important antagonist in the story.

Of course, without a weapon, the story would become easier. But if I took Aether just for that reason, it might impact the future in an unknown way. I was afraid of that uncertainty...

“Well, whatever.”

Tomer was strong even without Aether. Once all of my stats grew to about 3 or 4, I should go take Aether.

Wiing—

At that moment, I felt a vibration on my wrist. It was a message.

[Traveling Club Announcement]

—There will be a short trip on Sunday to serve as a freshman orientation.

“...Oh right.”

That was a thing. Immediately after I recalled information about the traveling club, the smartwatch vibrated once more.

[Academic Club Announcement]

—There will be an orientation on Friday for the freshmen.

“And there was this too. So annoying.”

I thought I could rest a bit in the weekend, but there were clubs over the weekend. Not to mention, the academic club was tomorrow.

†

Cube’s combat training was on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays. As such, I should have been able to relax on Mondays and Fridays, but on this precious Friday, I was walking towards a certain clubroom. Some distance ahead, Yoo Yeonha was showing off her elegant stride.

Academic club’s clubroom was room 304.

When I entered, I saw many first years as I expected. There were about 30, and 23 of them were girls. Most should have been bewitched by the club president.

After sneaking a look around the clubroom, I turned towards Yoo Yeonha’s direction and sat behind her. I could smell a flowery scent from her hair. After unavoidably smelling this scent for five minutes...

The club president finally showed up.

“Nice to meet you. I’m Yun Hyuk. Welcome to our academic club, Veritas.”

The club president was ‘Yun Hyuk’, a third year.

I didn't enter this club just for Yoo Yeonha.

Yun Hyuk was a Djinn. Soon, several incidents would happen in Cube, including a monster invasion. Yun Hyuk would be the mastermind behind it.

Of course, I had no reason to trouble myself by shouting, ‘That guy is a Djinn—!’

Though, that would probably give me a decent amount of SP.

In any case, Yun Hyuk was contracted to the Devil of Enchantment, Lilith. In exchange for selling his soul to the devil, he obtained a beautiful appearance and an ability called ‘Enchantment’. Currently, he should have his eyes out for Yoo Yeonha. That was the reason why Lilith gave him a high-rank ability like Enchantment.

“Since today’s just the orientation, we’ll only briefly discuss what our club is about.”

Hearing his charming voice, the eyes of the female cadets were already shining.

“In Veritas, we research and discuss classification, weaknesses, behaviors, and attributes of monsters. Topics include monster classification, how they behave, where their vital points are, what their attribute is, and how to deal with them efficiently.”

What Yun Hyuk mentioned was an important topic in modern society. ‘Monster analysis’ was one of the most competitive college majors, and there were even non-combatant Heroes who emphasized researching monsters. These Heroes, who didn’t have the Gift for combat, were still treated as Heroes because they had Gifts that aided in trans-human knowledge.

“I’ll give a quick example. Let’s take a look at this monster. As I’m sure you know, it is a totem scallop.”

A hologram image popped up. Just like its name suggested, the totem scallop was a scallop that produced a totem. Having high intelligence and capable of using magic, totem scallops were high-intermediate rank grade 3 monsters. Thankfully, they were gentle natured and didn’t attack as long as one stayed out of their territory.

But just like pearls produced by ordinary scallops, the totem scallops’ totems had an incredible value, making them the target of guilds everywhere.

“As you know, totem scallops are extremely hard to kill. But careful analysis shows that they’re classified no differently than an ordinary scallop. But because no other monsters share similarities with them, it is hard to guess where their vital point is.”

Yun Hyuk’s explanation continued. But because it was everything I already knew, I couldn’t help but yawn.

“Huaaaam...”

Immediately, Yun Hyuk’s eyebrows furrowed, and other female cadets sent me attacking glares. I wouldn’t be surprised if they attacked me for real if I yawned one more time. Only Yoo Yeonha kept her eyes on the screen.

“Kuhum.”

Yun Hyuk let out a dry cough before continuing his explanation.

“Because of its ambiguous attribute and behavior, the totem scallop’s vital point hasn’t been discovered. But for other monsters like the ‘Thousand-Mile Horse’...”



The orientation ended 40 minutes later. This time, I got up yawning inwardly as I didn’t want to get attacked.

I was about to leave when I saw Yun Hyuk approaching Yoo Yeonha. I paused.

“Yeonha cadet-nim.”

“Yes?”

“You forgot this.”

Yun Hyuk handed Yoo Yeonha a paper she left behind. This wasn’t something I wrote in my novel, so I didn’t know much about the paper. But I knew he was scheming somehow. Rather than Yoo Yeonha forgetting the paper, Yun Hyuk probably pulled it out with his magic power.

“Ah, yes, thank you.”

Yoo Yeonha took the paper with a smile. That seemed to be the end of their encounter.

After leaving the clubroom, I went to a nearby vending machine and pulled out a Coke and a Sprite. Looking at their names, I couldn't help but laugh. I named them Coin Cola and Spring Sprite to avoid trademark problems, and that was exactly how the names appeared on the cans.

Meanwhile, Yoo Yeonha left the clubroom.

With the Coke and Sprite cans in hand, I stood in front of her as though to block her path. Then, I handed the Coke to her.

"Here."

"...?"

Yoo Yeonha's face was full of question marks.

"I'm in the same club. Same team and now the same club. Funny coincidence, right?"

This was a test. Even working out as though my life depended on it only gave me 4 SP. Then how much SP could I get by talking to a leading character?

"...Do you think I'll drink something like this?"

Yoo Yeonha's eyebrows furrowed and her lips protruded out as though she was furious. But since it was the reaction I expected, I hit it off casually.

"I just got it from the vending machine."

Yoo Yeonha was likely attracted to bad boys. Of course, being 'handsome' was a requirement as well.

"Touch it. It's cold."

"I'm fine. You can have it. Also..."

I could feel hostility from the glare she gave me. But that was as much of her true

feelings the false mask she wore revealed.

“Don’t talk to me so casually. This is the first warning.”

That was it. Yoo Yeonha walked past me without waiting for my reply. Seeing her perfect figure walking away, I popped the Sprite can open.

Psssh— Gulp, gulp.

Yoo Yeonha’s shoulders twitched at the sound. According to my setting, Yoo Yeonha loved unhealthy food like carbonated drinks, hamburgers, fried chicken, and ramen. But she couldn’t buy them to save face, so she made her trusted butler or attendant buy it for her. Even then, she could only enjoy it once a week.

The reason was simple. Not only did she hate showing such side of her to others, but her mother also detested unhealthy commoner food.

To make up for the pitiful setting I gave her, I threw the Coke can into her luxurious brand bag. Drawing a clean arc, the Coke can landed inside.

“Carry me next time too.”

At these words, Yoo Yeonha glanced back. Then, she walked away muttering quietly to herself. However, I could hear her voice just fine.

—Who is this crazy guy?

†

Yoo Yeonha’s keen senses soon noticed the slight change in her bag. The water from the Coke can’s surface was making the textbook in her bag wet.

“...That nutjob.”

Yoo Yeonha took out the Coke can with a frown.
Just when did he put it in? That little rat.

“Huu.”

After a deep sigh, Yoo Yeonha released her magic power. Seeping into the paper, her magic power separated the moisture from the textbook and sent it into the air. When she retracted her magic power, the collected moisture fell down to the ground.

“Ehew.”

With a sigh, Yoo Yeonha broke out in a cold sweat. At the same time, she felt proud. The application of magic power she just showed was hard for even Heroes to accomplish. It was seemingly simple but was actually a mysterious and highly difficult technique.

“When I see him again...”

After the sense of pride came anger. Yoo Yeonha thought as she twisted her lips, ‘That talkative bum, I’ll need to ask the guys to educate him...’

But that thought only lasted for a moment. Fiddling with the Coke can in her bag, she looked around. There was no one nearby.

Kuhum. With a dry cough, she took out a handkerchief from her pocket and wrapped the Coke can with it before putting it back in the bag.

“Hmm.”

Then, as if nothing happened, she quickened her pace.

Chapter 11

Change (1)

After spending the rest of Friday working out and training, it became Saturday before I noticed.

[Traveling Club Announcement]

—There will be a short trip on Sunday to serve as a freshman orientation.

The traveling club's orientation was today. The meeting place was 'Cube Portal Station', which connected Cube to Seoul.

After stuffing my gun in my cross bag, I walked to the meeting place. Many of the leading characters — namely Kim Suho, Yi Yeonghan, Chae Nayun, and Yoo Yeonha — were already present.

They seemed completely oblivious to my existence, but being with them still made me nervous. Today in Seoul, an unexpected incident would occur. This would be the story's first major incident.

While I was organizing today's impending incident in my head, the club president arrived.

"Hello, I'm the club president, Oh Hanhyun. I didn't believe it when I saw so many club applications, but... it's real. Who knew such amazing cadets would join my club?"

With his average height and gentle first impression, Oh Hanhyun looked around the club members while scratching his neck.

"First, I'll give a short introduction about the traveling club."

With a bashful smile, he took out a piece of paper from his pocket. It looked like he had a speech prepared. I described Oh Hanhyun as a timid person, so I wasn't too surprised with his actions.

"Kuhum. Once or twice a month, we will leave Cube to travel. The purpose of the travel is to relax. So training during trips will be strictly forbidden. It's also why our club is

called 'Healing Rain.'"

Kuhum. After clearing his throat once more, he put the paper away. What, that was it?

"Today, as part of the orientation, we'll take a short trip to Seoul."

From here was what I wrote. The club members would form 2-people groups and go to Seoul.

"We'll have a theme for each trip. Since today's meant to be an orientation, we'll just have a free trip without anything complicated. But instead of traveling alone, we'll split into groups of two."

Here, Kim Suho would be paired with Chae Nayun and run into trouble while they were looking around a museum. As for that trouble, I would be able to experience it soon.

"Then we'll start by drawing lots."

Drawing lots was completely based on luck, but I could choose my fate. Thanks to my Gift, 'Observation and Reading,' I could see the content of the lots clearly. With my hand on my chin, I fell in thought. Should I choose Kim Suho? Or Chae Nayun?

"I'll go first."

At that moment, Yoo Yeonha stepped up. I watched her pull out a name without much thought. In the next instant, I realized I overlooked one vital information. It was the oddity known as Kim Hajin.

The lot drawn by Yoo Yeonha had the following name.

"Kim Hajin."

My heart dropped immediately. But there was no change in Yoo Yeonha's facial expression.

With her usual mask in place, she stared at me with calm eyes.



Thankfully, everything else had remained unchanged. Kim Suho became pairs with Chae Nayun, and Yi Yeonghan became pairs with the club president.

After drawing lots was over, the members gathered by their pairs and stood in front of the Portal.

Portal, the cutting-edge technology utilizing magic science and engineering. With a height of 15 meters and width of 30 meters, this giant gate was built in over a hundred places throughout Korea. With it, going from Seoul to Busan took less than 3 seconds.

“Cadet Kim Ha Jin. Confirmed.”

The Portal operator gave us a seal. This seal would resonate with the Portal and take us to Seoul.

“Let’s go.”

The club president went in first. The next to enter the swaying blue Portal was Kim Suho, Yi Yeonghan, Chae Nayun... and finally me.

A strange feeling enveloped my body, but only for a moment.

In the blink of an eye, the surrounding scenery changed to an unfamiliar place. A futuristic mixture of blue and grey, it had to be Seoul Portal Station. With just two steps, I had crossed the East Sea.

“It’s 12 P.M. right now, so we’ll meet back here at 6.”

Because the Portal we were at was connected to Cube, there wasn’t anyone around. But the Portal next doors connecting Seoul to Busan should be crowded with people. After all, they were both global cities.

“For now, follow me.”

Following the club president, we received another seal from the Portal employees before leaving the Portal Station.

After coming outside, I could immediately see the words, ‘Yongsan Station.’

“You can go wherever you want as a pair using the public transportation system. For today, we won’t require you to write a report, but make sure you’re back by 6. If you’re late, you’ll be penalized.”

With a warning from the club president, cadets left as pairs.

Yoo Yeonha didn’t say anything to me, but I followed behind her for now.

When I was checking out how Yongsan Station changed from what I knew, Yoo Yeonha suddenly came to a stop. After quickly turning around, she blurted out sharply.

“Let’s split up.”

“...Hm? Oh, yeah, sure.”

Yoo Yeonha most likely planned to visit the guild her father ran. I was fine with it. I planned to join Kim Suho no matter what Yoo Yeonha did.

“Again.”

But as though I ticked her off again, she glared at me with her hand on her hip.

“Don’t talk to me so casually.”^[1]

“...Huh?”

“This is the second warning. There won’t be a third time.”

I knew that she wasn’t bluffing. If I did it a third time, she might really get back at me in an unthinkable way.

“Yes, I understand. I apologize.”

“...Tsk.”

Young lady Yoo Yeonha then walked away without a goodbye. It was clear how much she disliked me.

Thus, Yoo Yeonha and I split up after just 5 minutes of arriving in Seoul.



“Whew, I thought I was lost.”

After switching buses three times, I finally arrived at the National Weapons Museum. Replicas of weapons excavated by Korea were displayed in this museum. Today, an incident would occur here. With a trembling heart, I walked in.

—Daddy, what’s that?

—Oh, that’s the Four Tiger Sword...

Perhaps because it was a weekend, the museum was bustling with parents and children who hoped to become Heroes.

But no matter the size of a crowd, there was bound to be people who stood out. Chae Nayun and Kim Suho were such examples, but I could only see Chae Nayun for now.

“...I want it.”

Smacking her lips, she was eyeing a bow in a glass display.

But my target today wasn’t Chae Nayun. Looking around, I began to look for someone. It didn’t take long. The main character’s tall and handsome features easily stood out. Approaching him furtively, I scanned the weapon Kim Suho was looking. Thankfully, it was a weapon I knew.

“Is this the famous Seven-Branched Sword?”

Before the Korean Peninsula was yet unified, the king of Baekje, the then most powerful kingdom, had bestowed this iron sword to the Japanese emperor. It was a historical weapon said to have been found in the final room of the Wiryeseong Dungeon.^[2]

“Hm? Ah...”

Kim Suho’s sight turned to me from the Seven-Branched Sword. However, it seemed he was at a loss for words. I had a good idea why.

“Kim Hajin.”

“Ah, right. Sorry, I didn’t expect to meet you here, so I forgot.”

With a kind smile, he pointed at another section of the museum.

“Apparently, the rifle Napoleon used is here. Have you seen it?”

“...Napoleon’s rifle?”

“Yep. Apparently, it was a reward from a Dungeon in France.”

According to my world setting, any weapon used by a legendary figure could become an artifact. Since that was the case, it wasn’t weird for there to be Napoleon’s rifle, even though I didn’t mention it in my novel.

Though I did want a rare weapon, I wasn’t really interested in a replica.

“No, I don’t think I’ll have time.”

I unintentionally answered without zeal.

I felt strange talking to the main character I wrote. I wasn’t sure how to describe this feeling, but it definitely wasn’t pleasant.

Kim Suho was handsome, exceptional in martial arts, and had a fantastic personality. He was too perfect, so he felt inhumane. That was why some readers rooted for Shin Jonghak.

Anyways, it should be about time.

I tapped on the ground with my sneakers.

“Then...”

Right when Kim Suho was saying something...

—BOOM!

A thunderous sound reverberated through the museum. In an instant, everyone became silent.

Koong. Koong. Koong. Repeated thuds pulsed through the deathly silence.

The sound resembling the footsteps of a giant creature soon led to the sound of something breaking. The atmosphere in the museum took a quick turn.

“Kyaaaak!”

“What is that!?”

The unknown led to anxiety, and anxiety quickly led to panic. Ordinary visitors screamed and began to run. However, only death was waiting outside. The safest place was the museum’s inside.

“Stay here! Don’t go out!”

Knowing that it would be dangerous outside, Kim Suho shouted.

Currently, the outside of the museum was being attacked by an intermediate rank monster and its subordinates.

Just a single intermediate rank monster posed little threat. A Hero would arrive in less than a minute, and 20 minutes was enough to take care of the entire situation.

But that wasn’t the only problem.

Djinn.

There was a Djinn here. Simply put, it was a double-pronged attack. After coming to a scene, Heroes went to the most dangerous area. Since the museum had security guards, it was less dangerous comparatively, putting it on a lower priority. Taking advantage of this fact, the Djinn Association dispatched an assassin to target a child considered by the Hero Association to have a special Gift.

Clang—

A sharp sound resounded. It was the sound of glasses shattering. The source of the sound wasn’t far away. Turning towards the direction of the sound, Kim Suho shouted.

“Chae Nayun!”

Chae Nayun had broken a display case and was taking out the bow inside.

“Are you crazy!?”

“No, I’m perfectly sane.”

Though it was only a replica, it was still an item on display. The museum’s siren rang and its defense mechanism activated. In just three seconds, all exits closed down. People panicked even more, but thankfully, even an intermediate rank monster couldn’t break through the barriers blocking the exits.

“This is better than stopping people one by one and warning them.”

With that, she cleared her throat and shouted at the panicking citizens.

“Everyone! Stay still! It’s safer here! We’re Heroes too!”

“Hey, you...”

“Shut it. Don’t just stand there, grab a weapon too.”

“What? Why should I?”

“Because it’s the outside that’s dangerous”

Looking at us... No, at Kim Suho, Chae Nayun created a magic arrow on her bow.

“Look there.”

She pointed with her eyes. A man wearing a black coat was standing there. Before Kim Suho could say anything, Chae Nayun fired her bow without a shred of hesitation.

“Hey, don’t—”

Her magic arrow pierced the man’s throat. Immediately, Kim Suho froze. He seemed dazed by Chae Nayun’s sudden murder.

Any ordinary person would have died to her arrow. However, the man grabbed the arrow sticking out of his neck and pulled it out. Black magic power then rose up from his hand, burning the arrow to ash.

Tap, tap.

The man then turned around, facing the direction the arrow came from. His eyes burned red, as fierce hostility shot out of him.

“...”

Without a doubt, he was a Djinn.

Kim Suho’s face paled. Just like Chae Nayun, he shattered a display case.

He took out the Seven-Branched Sword. Though it was a replica, its faithful reconstruction made it similar to a high grade weapon. It should be strong enough to

destroy a Djinn of this level.

“Oh, that’s a nice weapon. I heard it splits into seven branches.”

Chae Nayun approached with a smirk and stood by Kim Suho’s side.

I also took out my handgun. I thought about standing next to them, but after consideration, took two steps backward.

I was still too weak. If I showed off too much and got targeted by the Djinn, that would be the end of me.

1. In Korean, there’s a clear way to talk politely or casually (like between friends). Yeonha uses a strictly polite speech, while MC is using casual speech that would be between friends/people of the same age.

2. Wiryeseong is the name of two early capitals of Baekje

Chapter 12

Change (2)

A blue sword qi rose up around the Seven-Branched Sword. The purity of the blue mana brightened up the sword's blade. Sneaking a glance at Kim Suho's Seven-Branched Sword, Chae Nayun asked.

"You ready?"

"Yeah."

Meanwhile, I slowly backed off. There was nothing I could do here. Kim Suho would reveal his hidden power and easily take care of this Djinn. Overwhelmed by Kim Suho's might, Chae Nayun would give up seeing Kim Suho as a rival and come to admire him instead.

"Support me."

Fixing his grip on the sword, Kim Suho spoke.

"Support? Please, I'll be one killing him."

Rebutting playfully, Chae Nayun nocked another magic arrow.

"Guooo—!"

But before she could fire, the Djinn ignited his magic power. A jet-black evil qi hurled towards them like hellfire. But a single streak of light annihilated it. A Sword Saint could cut fire, wind, as well as magic power.

Chae Nayun's arrow then flew through the lifted magic power. The arrow containing condensed mana then pierced through the Djinn's shoulder.

Kim Suho didn't miss this opportunity. Leaping up, he cut down diagonally with his Seven-Branched Sword.

This attack should have severed the Djinn's flesh, immobilizing him. But despite having his flesh cut, the Djinn smiled. Kim Suho instinctively felt that something was wrong.

Immediately afterward, fierce magic power shot out from the cut.

As though standing under a torrential rain, Kim Suho was swept away by the magic power. He didn't even have the chance to scream. He flew across the museum and became stuck inside the museum's wall.

“...”

“...”

Both Chae Nayun and I became speechless.

Strange.

Something was definitely strange. This shouldn't have happened. After being pushed back for a bit, Kim Suho should have released his hidden power and overwhelmed his enemy...

“Uuu...”

Thankfully, Kim Suho got up. But he didn't seem to be in a good state.

“Hey, are you okay?”

“I'm fine... Kuu.”

Kim Suho needed time to mend his wounds. Now, the Djinn was walking towards Chae Nayun. Her face stiffened.

Chweek—

Chweek—

Chae Nayun fired two arrows. But none of them were effective. Even though she continued to shoot arrows until the Djinn looked like a porcupine, he didn't stop.

“...This isn't regeneration.”

Chae Nayun murmured in a daze. Just like she said, this Djinn didn't have high regenerative power. He simply had a sturdy body. In the first place, I didn't design him

to be an opponent Chae Nayun could defeat.

Chae Nayun's face turned ghastly pale, as fear and horror began to crop up.

"Just support me!"

At that moment, Kim Suho jumped in front of her, blocking the Djinn's path. However, the Djinn kept his eyes on Chae Nayun. Condensing his black mana on his arm, he produced a giant beast. A wolf-like creature bared its fangs as it shot towards Kim Suho.

"Uuuk!"

The Djinn fought Kim Suho with one hand and held Chae Nayun's face with the other.

"Are we screwed?" I murmured.

By now, I had run away to the back of the exhibition. However, this place was already occupied by what seemed to be a father-and-child duo.

"...Go that way."

"Y-Yes?"

"There, go farther back. It's dangerous here."

I could feel my voice trembling, and to be honest, I was scared to death.

"B-But..."

"While the Djinn's too busy fighting, hurry!"

At my urging, the two quickly scurried away.

From my cross bag, I took out my laptop.

The Djinn in my setting shouldn't have been that strong. What even was that arm? Sneaking a glance, I saw the Djinn's wolf-like arm fighting Kim Suho evenly. I had no memory making such a setting.

Something, I had to do something. At this rate, both Kim Suho and Chae Nayun could

die.

Unloading the magazine, I place a bullet on the laptop. My damned hands kept trembling.

With the laptop, I checked the bullet's setting.

===

[Mana Bullet]

「Null attribute」 「Attack Power (3/10)」

—A bullet with condensed mana. It is much stronger than a gunpowder bullet.

===

It wasn't enough. With an attack power of 3, even scratching that Djinn wouldn't be possible. But would increasing the attack power be enough? That was another question.

Thankfully, there was a hint within my setting.

The reason this world required a variety of Heroes was the concept of 'attributes'.

Depending on one's attribute, an attack could have varying effects. Contradicting attributes like water and fire could allow one to overcome a difference in power to a certain degree.

Now, the Djinn in question clearly had a darkness attribute. What pushed back darkness was undoubtedly 'light,' and I could do exactly that.

I just had to change the bullet's attribute.

===

[Mana Bullet]

「Light attribute」 「Attack Power (5/10)」

—A bullet with a condensed essence of light. Starts a secondary explosion after hitting its target.

===

[This modification requires 104 SP. Would you like to save this setting?]

It was expensive. 104 SP was 80% of what I gathered in the past week. But I still wasn't sure if this was enough. Rather than falling short, it was better to overdo it.

I tried adjusting the attack power to 6.

[You do not have enough SP. The value will be adjusted.]

「Attack Power (5.6/10)」

[Would you like to save the adjusted modification?]

I hit save. In that instant, a white light erupted from the laptop before melting into the magic bullet.

A silver-white light glistened from the bullet's iron casing.

Modification complete.

With only this single bullet loaded, I took in a deep breath. Then, I peeked past the wall.

Chae Nayun was still struggling to escape from the Djinn's grasp, while Kim Suho was fighting the Djinn's right arm. No, Kim Suho was pushing the Djinn back. We were at an advantage. It seemed he would defeat the right arm soon.

The problem was Chae Nayun. Because she couldn't breathe or because the Djinn's magic power was poisoning her, the area around her neck was purple.

Clicking my tongue, I jumped out.

"Hey!"

Then, I shouted loudly.

"Move!"

Without even turning around to look, Kim Suho rolled to the side. The Djinn's right arm came chasing after him, but that only increased the surface area for me to hit.

With a slightly calmer mind, I pulled the trigger. A bright light flashed from the gun barrel as though a flash bomb exploded.

The bullet of light emitted pressure and heat befitting its brightness. Unable to withstand the bullet's power, the handgun exploded in my hand. The gun's broken components fell down, while I writhed in unendurable pain.

Thankfully, the trajectory of the bullet didn't change. It flew along the intended trajectory, striking the Djinn's left shoulder.

Bull's eye.

A clump of light erupted from the Djinn's arm. The bullet's secondary explosion had detonated. The light disappeared, purifying the Djinn's arm. The Djinn had thus lost its arm.

Chae Nayun, who was on the brink of death, fell to the ground.

Kim Suho didn't miss this opportunity. A metal attribute magic power rose up from

his sword. The Sword Saint's all-severing sword technique finally activated. It should be limited to just once or twice a day for now, but that was enough.

I could just watch from the side now.

"...Hm?"

At that moment, a child approached me. It was the child who I met before. The child had a pretty face, but the short hair made it hard to identify her gender. Suddenly, the child grabbed my hand.

In an instant, my hand was healed completely.

I see, this must be the child the Hero Association barely managed to find. The child with the Authority of healing.

"Thanks."

With a grin, I stroked the child's hair.

Guuuu—!

At that moment, a deep growl rang out. I quickly turned my sight towards the direction of the noise. The Djinn, who had lost one arm, was gasping for breath while kneeled in front of Kim Suho.

It seemed Kim Suho managed to win.

"Huu..."

Feeling strength leaving my body, a sigh came out naturally.

I sprawled down on the ground.



"Gueeek!"

Chae Nayun, who just regained consciousness, was emptying her stomach with her face pointed down. From her small mouth, vomit continued to fall. The food she had yet to digest dirtied the ground, while pale yellow liquid stacked up around it.

Chae Nayun continued to vomit, as though she was coughing out blood. Looking at the horrific scene, I could practically feel her pain.

The reason Chae Nayun picked a bow was similar to mine. Though she acted manly on the outside, she was a sheltered lady on the inside. It wouldn't be until much later that she would overcome her delicate nature.

“...”

Kim Suho approached her to pat her back. But Chae Nayun hit his hand away fiercely. Kim Suho reluctantly backed away.

“Leave her be. I'm sure her older brother will come to console her.”

I said so thoughtlessly. In reality, things would turn out that way. Her older brother would arrive first, then her father would come to clean up everything. But it seemed Chae Nayun took my indifference as an insult.

“You, you... Gueeek!”

Her bloodshot eyes stabbed me. Did she want something or someone to blame? It was understandable. Unlike Yoo Yeonha, Chae Nayun was a real lady. Anything but the highest quality food would upset her stomach, and seeing a cockroach or a rat would ruin her mood for the whole day.

“...You.”

“I'll head out first.”

Kim Suho tried to say something. For some reason, Kim Suho's face was stiff. But ignoring it, I turned back. I also needed time to reflect. The Djinn's strength was far greater than what I had set. I couldn't understand why.



With a single swing, a thin blade cut through the air. But from the tip of the blade, an unidentifiable white magic power undulated, shooting out in all directions and obliterating all monsters.

A clean execution.

Yun Seung-Ah took back her sword and turned around. Her hair fluttered in the gentle

breeze. Dozens of ordinary people, who watched her attack, were left speechless. In their eyes, an unshakable respect and admiration could be seen. Seeing the world's most popular Hero attack would become a great bar story for a long time.

"You can rest assured."

"Vice-leader!"

A coarse voice interrupted Yun Seung-Ah's sentence. Yun Seung-Ah was slightly surprised.

The man who ran over quickly dropped a bombshell.

"A Djinn appeared at the National Weapons Museum!"

"...What?"

"You should head over immedi... What? What?"

But soon, he tilted his head and focused his hearing on the transceiver in his ear.

"...Ah, yes."

"What's wrong?"

"Um... Apparently, the Djinn has been taken care of. Three cadets from Cube happened to be at the museum..."

"Oh? That's great. Who were they?"

"Kim Suho, Chae Nayun, and... Ugh!"

Before he could finish, a violent gale rose up, blinding him momentarily. By the time he opened his eyes back up, the Hero who had decimated dozens of monsters was gone.

Running at the speed of light, Yun Seung-Ah arrived at the museum. An ordinary looking man walked out of the museum at the same time. Seeing Yun Seung-Ah, the man flinched for a moment before quickly bowing down.

“Hello.”

‘Does he know me? Well, there aren’t many who don’t.’

Though something felt out of place, Yun Seung-Ah greeted the man without much thought.

“Ah, yes, did something happen inside?”

“Yes. A Djinn appeared. He just died though.”

“I see... And you are?”

At Yun Seung-Ah’s question, the man replied with a grin.

“I’m a cadet.”

At his word, Yun Seung-Ah was taken aback. She finally figured out the previous strange feeling she had. Though she was acting humble, Yun Seung-Ah was one of the most popular Heroes in Korea. As a result, most cadets would freeze in front of her or act nervous at the very least.

“...Oh, I see.”

“Then, I’m off. The ones you’re looking for should be inside.”

But the man who introduced himself as Kim Hajin walked away smiling without a hint of nervousness. Yun Seung-Ah observed him walking away for a moment.

“Who is he?”

Quite daring for a young cadet. But Kim Hajin...? I wasn’t familiar with the name. How did he know who I came for?

Thinking so, Yun Seung-Ah sauntered into the museum.

The inside of the museum was a mess. The tiled floors were full of signs of battle, and an ominous magic power still lingering in the air proved the existence of the Djinn.

“Nayun!”

At that moment, a vehement voice rang out from the entrance. Yun Seung-Ah turned back. There, she saw a middle-aged man looking around the museum with reddened eyes. It was someone she knew.

Chae Nayun's father, Chae Shinhyuk.

"Chae Shinhyuk-ssi?"

"...Vice-leader Yun Seung-Ah?"

"Ah... You must be busy lately. It's been a while. Should we go together?"

Pointing deeper into the museum, Yun Seung-Ah smiled.



A curved telephone pole and a car sticking out of a window, in this strange place that couldn't possibly be normal, I managed to grab a bench for myself. Heroes were busily running around cleaning up the situation, but I was in a bit of a panic myself.

The story had changed. If this world was the world within my novel, this couldn't have happened. Of course, an oddity known as 'Kim Hajin' had already intervened, but his role had been minimal. Everything had also been fine until now.

I most certainly had not done anything that could have affected...

Suddenly, a streak of thought flashed across my mind.

"...Ah, that's right."

I had forgotten until now.

I wasn't the sole author of this story.

To be precise, this world wasn't the novel I wrote.

To be even more precise, this world was the remake version of my novel.

"There's a co-author..."

After thinking that far, an unknown feeling of emptiness rose up within me. Why was I so relaxed this entire time? Live a comfortable life? No, that was impossible from the start. Just like when someone stopped me from modifying invariable stats, that 'someone' wouldn't let that happen.

Wiing—

At that moment, the laptop vibrated like a phone.

When I opened it, I saw a message.

[Flaw. There is no semblance of danger for the main character and others. If the story continues this way, the readers would become bored thinking, “The main character will win anyways.”]

“...This crazy motherfu...”

No danger? Of course, there was no danger. Readers didn't like extreme danger! This thoughtless amateur...

However, there was another line below.

[Makeshift solution. Even if things become a mess, increase the power of antagonists.]

Chapter 13

Change (3)

[At around 1 P.M. today, a group of monsters appeared in Seoul, leaving 500 wounded and 7 dead.]

A new anchor was reporting on today's incident. With a deep sigh, Chae Shinhyuk stroked the bedridden patient. Her pale complexion seemed to stab her father's heart. Though she was an adult who would soon become a Hero, Chae Nayun was still like a little girl to Chae Shinhyuk.

[...According to the investigation, the monster group was led by the intermediate rank grade 1 monster, 'beast inciter'. This man-sized, badger-shaped monster has never before appeared in Korea. The Association believes that the monster was brought in by a third party, and has set out in a search.]

"...Mmm."

At that moment, Chae Nayun opened her eyes. Chae Shinhyuk immediately shot up and called for a doctor.

"You're awake. How are you feeling?"

"...Fine."

Chae Nayun raised her feeble body. A doctor came running in to check her pulse, but Chae Nayun pushed him away with a smile.

"I'm fine, Dad."

"Really?"

"Of course. I'm not injured. Didn't the doctor tell you?"

"I, I did."

The doctor spoke up inadvertently. Chae Shinhyuk was a powerful figure who had the country's economy in his palm. He knew being on this man's bad side would only make his life more difficult.

"...She seems fine, so you can go now."

"Yes, sir."

The doctor hurriedly ran out. Looking at the closing door, Chae Nayun spoke briefly.

"...Dad."

"Hm?"

Chae Shinhyuk replied kindly.

"About Oppa."

Her low-spirited voice evoked the dark past he wanted to forget. Remembering his son always caused a sharp pain in his heart. With a gentle smile, Chae Shinhyuk held his daughter's hand.

"...What's wrong?"

"Can I go see him when I'm discharged? I'm on a sick leave anyway, right?"

"Of course you can."

Chae Shinhyuk agreed easily.

Chae Nayun leaned her head against her father's shoulder and recalled what happened earlier in the day.

The Djinn from the museum, the black hand that strangled her, and a voice that mentioned her older brother... At that point, Chae Nayun's fury revived.

"Dad, by the way..."

Chae Nayun's tone was dark. Her voice carried a heavy emotion. Chae Shinhyuk asked worriedly.

“What’s up?”

“...No, it’s nothing.”

Suddenly, she began to loathe someone from the bottom of her heart. But she couldn’t tell her father how she felt.

She thought back to when her stomach was boiling from being poisoned by the Djinn’s magic power. Even while she was writhing in pain, she could hear that man’s voice clearly.

—I’m sure her older brother will come console her.

That man had mentioned her brother. Four years ago, on the day the sky fell, everyone in the world found out. So she didn’t have the time to be sad. After that day, her brother’s name was etched deep inside her heart, and he became an untouchable subject to her.

As a cadet at Hero Academy, that man should have known about her brother’s state. Even so, he had mentioned her brother in that way.

Chae Nayun suppressed the fury rising from her heart and engraved the man’s name in her head.

Kim Hajin, Kim Hajin.

From this day, Chae Nayun would no longer forget this name.



Seoul’s sky was dyed in an orange hue. The movement of the sun was no different than usual, but the scene reflected by the setting sun could only be described as a pandemonium.

Pieces of asphalt littered the road, while a child was crying under a telephone pole snapped in half. Ambulances traveled back and forth, carrying wounded people or corpses.

Although the situation had been taken care of by the dispatched Heroes, the aftermath of chaos still remained.

“Kim Suho, Kim Hajin. We heard the story.”

Kim Soohyuk was waiting at the Portal connecting Seoul and Cube.

“We will ask for details later, so go back and rest for now. Agents will take care of the rest.”

For the record, agents were different than Heroes. Agents were those who graduated from Agent Military Academy but didn't enter Cube. In other words, they were non-combatants. Most of them had abilities that were very useful in day-to-day life. For example, I saw a man on my way back, who was fixing the broken asphalt with a wave of a hand.

“Um, instructor. Chae Nayun is...”

Kim Suho asked, to which Kim Soohyuk gave a short reply.

“She's taking a sick leave. She's with her family right now.”

“Yes, understood.”

Kim Suho didn't ask any more questions.

“Go back.”

Other cadets seemed to have helped out with the unexpected emergency, as even Yoo Yeonha looked tired.

One by one, we trudged to the Portal. The odd sensation enveloping my body didn't feel interesting anymore. After a short sigh, I found myself back at Cube.

Without any words, the group walked to the dorm.

“...Hey.”

On our way back to dorm 1, after the girls went ahead, Kim Suho stopped me.

“What.”

“Why did you say that?”

“...Say what?”

“To Chae Nayun.”

What was he talking about all of the sudden? When I furrowed my brows in incomprehension, Kim Suho suddenly became a bit more hostile.

“Why did you bring up her older brother? In such a condescending way too.”

“What do you mean? I didn’t mean much by...”

At that instant, I swallowed my words.

This world had a co-author. My setting wasn’t the only setting at play. Something had to have changed.

“...What about her older brother?”

At my question, Kim Suho stopped his steps. Gritting his teeth, he glared at me.

“It’s something every cadet knows, but you’re going to pretend you don’t know?”

“What? No, I really don’t—”

“Whatever. We can talk about it later. For now...”

Kim Suho quickly walked past me and got on the elevator. Under his glaring eyes were thick dark circles. Since he used 'that' ability, he needed to crash. Since my room was on the first floor, I didn’t need to get on the elevator.



The moment I sat down on my couch, I turned on my smartwatch. An internet window popped up in the air. This world’s main search engine was Neighbor^[1]. The interface was no different than what I was used to, so getting used to it posed no problem.

First, I looked up Chae Nayun.

What Kim Suho said and how Chae Nayun reacted were indeed strange.

===

[Chae Nayun] (Hero cadet)

Family – Father: Chae Shinhyuk, Older Brother: Chae Jinyoon

Education

—Agent Military Academy Rank 4

—Currently attending Hero Military Academy (Cube)

===

“So what’s the problem?”

Chae Jinyoon. It’s not like he was dead or missing, so why were they so worked up? Even as I tilted my head, I looked up Chae Jinyoon. At the same time, my jaws dropped.

“...Huh?”

[Chae Shinhyuk’s son, Chae Jinyoon. In critical condition from a Djinn attack.]
[The Djinn suppression operation, ‘Fireflake’, succeeds... However, the rookie Hero, Chae Jinyoon, falls in a coma.]

There were headlines I couldn’t understand.

“What?”

Djinn suppression operation, Fireflake. I knew what it was. It was the first operation that gave Chae Jinyoon fame. By leading this operation to a success and rescuing three comrades in the process, he would have been promoted to an intermediate rank Hero. Chae Nayun, who was only 13 at the time, would have always bragged about her older brother who suddenly rose to fame. No, that was how things should have been.

“What the hell is going on?”

Unable to take everything in, I took out my laptop. If there was a hint, the laptop had to have it.

[Thanks to your high luck, light bullet deals critical damage to 'Dog of Lucius'.]
[With great luck, your understanding of the light attribute increases!]
[With extreme luck, you absorb part of the magic power emitted by the light bullet! Your magic power increases by 0.03 points.]
[You dealt critical damage to a more powerful enemy. The skill, ‘Sharpshooter of Reversal’, has been added to your Gift 「Master Sharpshooter」.]
[Your SP increases by 131.]

There were many pleasant alerts, but I turned them all off.

I looked for my settings book. No, I didn't need to look for it. This settings book was something I wrote. Since what happened today wasn't part of my setting, looking for my settings book wouldn't do anything.

However, I had received a message on my laptop.

[Chae Jinyoon – In the original story, he was Chae Nayun's reliable older brother and Kim Suho's trustworthy helper. However, it has been judged that the main character has too many helpers, and thus this setting was changed.]

[Modified setting – In his first mission as a Hero four years ago, Chae Jinyoon receives a Devil's Branding and falls into a coma. Currently, he is a Devil's Seed.]

[Note: Modified settings will be provided as messages once the target, 'Kim Hajin', becomes aware of it.]

Without realizing that my mouth was open, I stared at the screen in a daze.

By the time my saliva dropped on the laptop, I barely managed to eek out a voice.

“Fucking...”

And that was all I could say.

If this message was true, this was an extremely serious problem.

Devil's Seed was something that only appeared in the latter half of the novel. If it sprouted, the current Kim Suho was nowhere strong enough to stop it. A Master rank Hero would be able to stop it, but most Master ranks had left the secular world.

Even if high-rank Heroes were dispatched, a few of them would surely be sacrificed.

That couldn't happen. Their strength was needed in the novel's latter parts.

In other words, everything would go awry if this Devil's Seed sprouted. Of course, things had already gone awry, but it was still to a manageable degree.

Then what could I do?

There was only one answer, so I didn't need to think for long.

“...He needs to die.”

Thankfully, the Devil's Seed had an incubation period. From what I recall, it should be 5 or 6 years.

Four years had already passed.

As quickly as possible, before the Devil inside Chae Jinyoon's body woke up, Chae

Jinyoon had to be killed.

The problem was 'who'.

Who should kill him?

I couldn't hire an assassin. Even if I offered billions of won, no mercenary was crazy enough to accept a mission to kill a chaebol.

Not to mention, because the Devil's Seed was undetectable, no one would believe me even if I told the truth. In fact, I was sure I would just be treated as a crazy person.

He needed to die.

There was only one way this could be done.

"I have to kill him."

With a deep sigh, I closed my eyes.

Chae Jinyoon was a reliable friend and helper for Kim Suho, though he was an idiot when it came to his sister. But in this world, he had become a character that had to be killed. While this complete change was shocking, I didn't have the peace of mind to be shocked.

I got up. My body felt especially heavy. The sense of familiarity I felt towards the world I created transformed into a greater anxiety.

But perhaps thanks to my high perseverance, my legs weren't heading towards the bed, but the physical training room.

1. A play on word on Korea's search engine, Naver.

Chapter 14

For Growth (1)

Tower of Hero, located in the heart of Seoul.

On the 103rd floor of this Hero Association headquarters, Yun Seung-Ah was reading the records on the recent incident unauthorized. The video she was watching was filmed by the museum's camera. Naturally, it contained the battle between Cube's cadets and a Djinn.

Though she was a bit hesitant, knowing she could get in trouble if found out, the words she heard from a Hero Association agent urged her forward.

—A trace of light attribute mana was found at the scene.

Light attribute mana. Not only was it strange, it was also extremely valuable. Light attributed Heroes played vital roles in suppressing Djinns, as most Djinns had the darkness attribute.

The fact that light attribute was detected in the museum naturally meant that one of the three cadets who defeated the Djinn had the light attribute.

Yun Seung-Ah, who often emphasized the importance of attributes wherever she went, wanted to know the owner of that rare mana.

“But this person...”

Indeed, there was a man who caught her attention. From head to toe, he was ordinary in every way. Inside the video, the man in question was talking to Kim Suho. When the Djinn appeared, he backed off stealthily and simply spectated the fight.

But seeing the Kim Suho being pushed back, he went into hiding and began to make strange actions. He unloaded his gun, leaving only a single bullet behind. Then, he began to tap on thin air.

After about a minute, he loaded the bullet in his gun and headed to battle.

What happened next was even more mysterious.

His gun exploded at the same time he fired his gun, while a brilliant white light dyed the surroundings. Because of the light, the camera froze up for three seconds. By the time the screen came back to normal, everything was settled.

“...Hmm.”

Most people assumed the attack to be Kim Suho’s, but Yun Seung-Ah was doubtful. No matter how she thought about it, the light had to have come from the man’s attack. Even Kim Suho admitted in his report, “Kim Hajin covered me.”

“Kim Hajin. I remember him now. He’s the cadet who chose a gun... So there was a reason he chose it.”

Thud!

At that moment, the door shot open. Startled, Yun Seung-Ah turned to the door.

There, she was the Association’s executive, Aileen.

Though she had a small build and was only 153cm tall, Yun Seung-Ah knew that a 10m tall giant resided inside her. Unfortunately for her, Aileen was glaring at her with terrifying eyes. Yun Seung-Ah’s face paled as she jumped up in horror.

“Un, Unni?”

“I knew you were here. Come out.”

“Ah, wait, Unni. I can explain. I can...”

“Shut up and follow me.”

Yun Seung-Ah didn’t want to follow her out even if it cost her life. But her body moved on its own. It was Aileen’s one-of-a-kind Gift, ‘Spirit Speech’. Of course, as powerful as it was, the price she had to pay was equally great. There was a high risk of magic power recoil and her underdeveloped body was also a price she had to pay. But still...

“Unni, I’m a Hero too! Please, give me some face!”

Her ability was honestly too much of a cheat.

“Only the Association’s Heroes are authorized to come in here.”

“I know! I’ll leave on my own, so let me go!”

“You better hurry before I throw you out the window.”

In the end, Yun Seung-Ah was chased out of the record room.

“You have two choices. One, be punished. Two, help me with something.”

“I’m sorry. Please, let me go this one time. I don’t want to do either.”

Only the video Yun Seung-Ah was watching was left to play in the emptied room.

“Save me—!”



[Tuesday’s combat training, labyrinth exploration.]

Inside a dark cave created by Cube, Yoo Yeonha, me, and the rest of team 5 were in the middle of our combat training.

“Hoseung-ssi, Hazuki-ssi, can you see something?”

Yoo Yeonha asked with a frown.

We were in an artificial dungeon designed after a dark labyrinth. The goal of the training was to break through the labyrinth filled with undead monsters and to reach the labyrinth’s center. Because the mist was created through darkness mana, even Heroes found it difficult to light up the cave.

“No, I can’t.”

“Me neither...”

Jin Hoseung and Hazuki answered.

“...Tsk.”

Yoo Yeonha clicked her tongue and didn't ask anymore. I was still treated as an invisible person, even after I gifted her a Coke.

Shaking my head, I spoke, “I can see.”

“Huh?”

“Really?”

Jin Hoseung and Hazuki were surprised, but Yoo Yeonha ignored me.

“I said, I can see.”

Annoyed at her attitude, I spoke loudly to the back of her head.

“I can see through the dark.”

At that instant, Yoo Yeonha turned back quickly with glaring eyes. However, she was facing Jin Hoseung, not me.

“Stop fooling around.”

Insulted out of the blue, Jin Hoseung was taken aback, while I retorted casually.

“I'm just saying, you're going to fall if you go that way.”

“What nonsense— kyak!”

Yoo Yeonha missed her footing at just the right time. As she began to plummet downwards, I jumped in and grabbed her arm. Yoo Yeonha clutched my shoulder with trembling hands.

“...Kuhum.”

After climbing back up using my body as a rope, Yoo Yeona let out a dry cough as though nothing happened.

“...Looks like you aren't lying. How can you see?”

“I have good eyes.”

It was thanks to my Gift. Thousand-Mile Eyes weren't hindered by distance or obstacles. That, of course, included lighting.

“...Good, you should at least be able to do that much. So, where should we go?”

“Just follow me.”

“Oh~ how reliable~”

Jin Hoseung placed his hand on my shoulder as though we were friends. Taking his hand off, I walked forward.

Things were pretty easy from that point.

I just had to walk, dodging what I could dodge and notifying Yoo Yeonha what I couldn't.

If the unavoidable enemy was a fluid-bodied spirit, Yoo Yeonha's merciless whip took care of it, and if it was an undead, Jin Hoseung and Hazuki took care of it.

My stamina had increased thanks to working out, so there was no problem there. Though not having to run played a big part, this particular training was a breeze.

And now, I could see the result with my own eyes.

We managed to reach the center of the labyrinth. There, we only saw 8 people. In other words, we scored third place.

“Yoo Yeonha?”

“Hey, Jonghak.”

Shin Jonghak, who was sitting on a rock acting needlessly cool, called Yoo Yeonha. She ran towards him with an amiable smile. How she treated Shin Jonghak was clearly different than how she treated me.

“Over here.”

Kim Soohyuk, who was waiting, read out our time without paying attention to Yoo Yeonha's touching reunion.

"Team 5. 48 minutes 10 seconds. Third place."

At the same time, Jin Hoseung and Hazuki cheered.

"Whoo. It's all thanks to you. You really have great eyes~"

"You do, you do!"

For now, I sat on the ground with them. Yoo Yeonha had already left for Shin Jonghak, and Kim Suho was sleeping on the ground. It seemed he was still suffering from releasing his ability at the museum.

I also relaxed.

In about five minutes, another team arrived. I wasn't surprised with who it was. Sharpshooters generally had good eyes.

"It's Nayun."

Seeing Chae Nayun's silhouette from the darkness, Yoo Yeonha approached, pretending to be happy.

For some reason, Chae Nayun was covered in dust. It seemed she fell into a trap. Walking towards my direction, she rested her eyes on me and paused. Her cold eyes seemed to pierce through me.

"...Nayun?"

She didn't respond to Yoo Yeonha's call. Ignoring her completely, Chae Nayun marched towards me and asked suddenly.

"What was your time?"

It was a short question. I gave back a short reply.

"...48 minutes."

Chae Nayun clenched her teeth. Sharpshooters often acted as a team's pathfinder. Chae Nayun rightfully thought I guided my team.

"Looks like even you have something you're good for."

It was a clear provocation. I hesitated to reply. Should I strike back?

I did have a good reason to do so.

The novel's antagonists had become stronger, so it was necessary for our side... though the current Chae Nayun might not be on my side... Anyways, it was necessary for the leading characters to also get stronger.

To do that, Chae Nayun needed to quickly abandon the bow. In this world, her potential was second only to Kim Suho. But with a bow, her potential would be wasted.

"...I guess you're right."

But I still didn't find the need to respond to her provocation.

Between negative motivation and positive motivation, Chae Nayun was more affected by the former according to my setting. However, the agent of the motivation was important. A weakling like me provoking her most likely wouldn't have much meaning.

Now wasn't the time. Furthermore, I was confident that it wouldn't be long until I surpassed Chae Nayun in archery.

I just had to wait until then.

"Hmph."

Chae Nayun seemed bored by my retreat, as she returned with a snort.

I shook my head.

At that moment, my eyes met Yoo Yeonha's. For some reason, her eyes carried a slight hint of interest that hadn't existed before.

"Hmph."

...But soon, she walked away with the same disdainful snort as Chae Nayun.

Chapter 15

For Growth (2)

Today's combat training came to an end.

Though I was exhausted, I still had to go to the academic club. After that, I had to do my daily workout. Thinking about the agony of my daily life, I became depressed. If I knew this would happen, I would have put more points into perseverance.

...In any case, I was currently heading to the academic club's clubroom. Perhaps because this was the usual path she took or because we had a similar personality, I could see Yoo Yeonha in front of me.

Yoo Yeonha herself didn't see me and continued walking. When she arrived at the clubroom, she stood in front of the door and took out a hand mirror. She lightly checked to see whether or not anything was on her. But at that exact moment, her eyes met mine.

"What a coincidence, right?"

"..."

Ignoring me, Yoo Yeonha walked in. I also followed. Yoo Yeonha sat on a sunny seat, while I took the dark corner seat.

Yun Hyuk, the club president, was already standing on the podium. Wearing his glasses, he seemed to be organizing today's lecture notes.

Not long afterward, 43 first years arrived along with 20 upperclassmen. At seven on the dot, Yun Hyuk began the first academic club lecture.

"Good evening, everyone. The weather's starting to get..."

Any useless talk went into one ear and left from the other.

"Today, we will discuss monsters' vital points. As I'm sure you all know, the location of a monster's vital point is an important piece of information in defeating a monster.

You can see how critical this information can be by looking at senior Seo Youngji. By reaching the pinnacle of this ability, she has reached top 2000 on Hero rankings.”

A hologram of Seo Youngji’s specs popped up on the projection screen.

A Hero’s specs were summarized into strength, dexterity, durability, constitution, and magic power. Other than dexterity, Seo Youngji’s specs were all under intermediate rank, but her dexterity was at the Master rank. For the record, only 300 Heroes in the world had Master ranked dexterity.

“Senior Seo Youngji even hunted a high rank monster by herself.”

As he said, Seo Youngji was a well-known character in this world. Though she had an introverted personality, I was sure I would meet her since she played an important role in the story.

“But don’t think monsters’ vital points are the same as a human’s. For us, the eyes, heart, and head serve as vital points, but that isn’t always the case for monsters.”

To add on, a monster’s vital point became stranger the higher ranked it was.

“Now, let’s take a look at an example.”

In an instant, a hologram of a monster appeared on the screen.

Though it looked similar to a mountain tiger, its giant body, bloodshot eyes, and ferocious teeth clearly indicated that it wasn’t a normal tiger.

“This monster is called the Mountain Tyrant. It can be classified anywhere from intermediate rank to high rank. As one of the first monsters to have appeared during Outcall, it has been known for 50 years, but its vital point hasn’t been discovered yet.”

With that, Yun Hyuk paused and made a meaningful smile.

“...At least, that’s how things are in public. In reality, even if an individual or a guild knew its vital point, they wouldn’t reveal it to the public. They likely weren’t allowed to either.”

He was right. In this world, information was an industry. There were large corporations solely focused on gathering and researching information on monsters, and in a smaller scale, private detectives and detective agencies gathered and sold

information. As such, leaking such information was heavily penalized.

Of course, requiring this information to be public would greatly help humanity fight against monsters, but the power of capitalism suppressed any debates on this topic.

“Now, where do you think this Mountain Tyrant’s vital point is?”

Yun Hyuk gave Yoo Yeonha a meaningful look. A Mountain Tyrant’s vital point, Yoo Yeonha likely had no clue. Even I only created the setting and never used it. There just wasn’t a chance for the main character to go tiger-hunting.

“...”

As I thought, she didn’t seem to know. Seeing as how she was fiddling with her hair and looking around, it seemed she was ashamed for not knowing the answer.

“Would anyone like to guess?”

I, of course, knew the answer. It was a good opportunity to stand out, but I didn’t raise my hand. Yun Hyuk was acting like he did. Though his pretentious face irritated me, I wanted to see what he was scheming.

“I...”

At that moment, a girl raised her hand. I was surprised. Who the heck was that?

“Is it his nose?”

She guessed with a flushed face.

She was just an extra who fell for Yun Hyuk.



The academic club continued for two hours. Unexpectedly, there was a lot to learn like the vital points of monsters, compatibility between attributes, and the difference between a magic and a spell. I learned in detail about things I had lazily explained in my novel, all the while I watched cute female cadets discuss the topic.

“We have an after-party planned at a nearby restaurant! It’ll be great if you can come!”

Anyways, after the club ended, Yun Hyuk announced that there was an after-party at a nearby restaurant.

For some reason, Yoo Yeonha seemed interested in going. Feeling a bit worried, I followed her. I knew she wasn't the type to participate in things like after-parties.

"Hey, you going?"

I approached her casually and asked.

She didn't respond.

Thinking it was because of the way I talked, I asked again.

"Are you going?"

She ignored me again.

This time, I asked with even more decorum and propriety.

"Are you also going to the after-party, Yeonha-ssi?"

Only then did Yoo Yeonha respond with a faint nod.

"Why? Aren't you busy?"

"...Tsk."

'This fool.'

That was what Yoo Yeonha's eyes were saying.

"Why are you going?"

"Aren't you curious about the Mountain Tyrant's vital point?"

"...Huh?"

Oh, I get it now.

Public information on the Mountain Tyrant was scant to say the least. Not only did its strength vary greatly from individual to individual, it also lived in an extremely remote place. Although the Mountain Tyrant's leather sold for a hefty price, it was hard to plan

a hunt when one couldn't be sure of the efficient number of people to bring.

Yoo Yeonha was the successor of a major guild.

So the reason Yun Hyuk acted like he knew the Mountain Tyrant's vital point was this. Because I didn't write my novel from Yoo Yeonha's point of view, I didn't exactly write out how Yun Hyuk managed to coax Yoo Yeonha. It seemed 'guild' was the keyword for luring her out.

Yoo Yeonha had a guild lineage. Her clan had risen to power during Outcall 50 years ago, thanks to the massive success of her family's first generation head.

Her family was still a successful Hero clan, but Yoo Yeonha had a bit of an inferiority complex. Compared to a true noble clan, she felt her family was lacking. This was why she saw Shin Jonghak favorably, and it was also why she was overly obsessed with face and decorum.

"...The Mountain Tyrant's vital point?"

Was this a good chance to make an investment? There was a lot to gain from keeping a cordial relationship with Yoo Yeonha. With great proficiency in handling businesses and at calculating profitability, she was destined to become the 'King of Seoul' in the future.

"I'm not curious. I already know."

"What?"

Yoo Yeonha asked again as she furrowed her brows. She looked thoroughly annoyed on top of being in disbelief.

At that moment, I made my decision. Using this information that would be publicized one day, I would draw Yoo Yeonha's interest and instill a sense of mystery into her. Considering the SP and additional benefits I would gain from it, it was an acceptable trade.

I lowered my voice to a whisper and relayed the information to her in a serious tone.

"The Mountain Tyrant's vital point is on the heel of its hindleg."

"What nonsense are you..."

"There's a blue mark on its hindleg's heel. But its DNA determines whether it's the right hindleg or the left. That's probably why its vital point hasn't been discovered

until now.”

I was the one who created the setting for the Mountain Tyrant. I was inspired by the story of Achilles’ Heel when I made the setting. It was unlikely that this setting was changed, as tiny details seemed to be left untouched.

“The Mountain Tyrant’s body is tough, but this blue mark on its heel is the only place that’s soft. That’s the Mountain Tyrant’s vital point. If you strategize around it, it should be easy to rob it of its two hind legs.”

The value of this information had to be tens of millions of won. But considering my current credibility, it likely wouldn’t be over 100 won.

“...Nuthead.”

As expected, Yoo Yeonha gave a disdainful look as though she was looking at an insect. She then began to walk away. I followed after her.

“It’s true. Believe me.”

“Would you believe me if our positions were swapped?”

“..”

I, of course, wouldn’t have believed her.

“It’s your choice whether to believe me or not...”

I hoped she would.

“Hey!”

At that moment, Yun Hyuk suddenly cut in between Yoo Yeonha and me. Shoving me back slightly, he asked.

“Don’t you think you’re being too pushy?”

Because of this cheesy son of a bitch’s height, I had to look up at him. But instead, I turned to Yoo Yeonha.

“Am I bothering you?”

“Yes.”

“Heh.”

She gave a cold hearted reply. I grew angry at Yun Hyuk’s mocking laugh.

“By the way, are you also coming to the after-party?”

He spoke condescendingly. I shook my head.

“I’m not.”

“Then don’t bother other people too much. Um, Yeonha-ssi...?”

However, Yoo Yeonha had already begun to walk away.

“Heh.”

I returned what I received. With a distorted face, Yun Hyuk chased after Yoo Yeonha. I, on the other hand, simply watched them leave.

I gave Yoo Yeonha a valuable information, but I didn’t know whether she would use it or forget about it. In the case of the former, I would gain a likely ally, and in the case of the latter... nothing would happen.

In any case, I had nothing to lose.



On a dark winter night, Yoo Yeonha was deep in thought as she tapped on her desk with her pen.

Tomorrow, ‘Essence of the Strait’ guild’s elite team would go out to hunt a Mountain Tyrant.

They had secretly purchased information about a lone Mountain Tyrant living in Kumgang Mountain, and they had already confirmed its size with a scout.

It was estimated to be high-intermediate rank grade 1. The strength of its pelt reached Promentium, a tough ore found after Outcall. As such, the guild would gain an astronomical income if the hunt was successful.

But Yoo Yeonha was worried about one thing. It wasn't for the safety of the elite hunting team. The current vice-leader of 'Essence of the Strait' held too much power. She felt her seat as the guild's successor threatened.

Right, Yoo Yeonha's worry was about this. To succeed the guild without a problem, she had to start making contributions.

In the end, Yoo Yeonha turned on her smartwatch. Using its communication functionality, she made a phone call. Soon, the receiver picked up, and a hologram screen popped up.

"...Um, Uncle?"

—Yes, Young Lady.

On the screen was Kim Sangho. He was a veteran in his forties, who was her father's most trusted right arm. Ever since she was a child, Yoo Yeonha treated him like her real uncle.

—What's wrong?

Though she made the call, Yoo Yeonha was too embarrassed to say anything.

A blue mark on its heel? You can disable both of its hind legs by attacking it? Just what was I doing, fooled by that crazy's nonsense?

"Um, I'm saying this just in case..."

But the possibility wasn't zero and it didn't seem like it would hurt to try. Though it came from that crazy nutjob, there had to be a reason he was so confident. Justifying herself, Yoo Yeonha caught her breath.

—Yes, Young Lady?

"Um, I know it sounds crazy, but..."

Closing her eyes and clenching her fists, she spoke.

“If things are looking rough, try looking at its hind legs’ heels.”

—... Hindlegs’ heels?

Kim Sangho furrowed his brows.

Yoo Yeonha knew what that meant. But if she could be of help, and if this information was real...

“Yes, its hind legs’...heels. Either on its left or right heel, there should be... well, I’m not sure if it’s true, but...”

Yoo Yeonha continued while risking being embarrassed.

“If there is a blue mark there, try aiming for that place.”

Chapter 16

For Growth (3)

In the middle of the night when owls came out to cry, I came back from working out and collapsed on my bed.

Ever since I came to this world, I found it hard to fall asleep. My body was tired, but countless random thoughts emerged in my head preventing me from falling asleep.

How could I survive in this world? What actions should I take? Should I be a supporter who secretly helps the leading characters? Or should I become a villain and execute the evil side from the inside like in the noir movie I saw?

Then, I got suddenly curious about my current stats. I looked for my laptop.

===

▷Stats

*Variable stats

[Strength 1.735]

[Stamina 1.845]

[Speed 2.15]

[Perception 2.605]

[Vitality 1.65]

[Magic power 1.3]

===

Sure enough, my stats were on the rise. All stats other than magic power had surpassed an average adult male's (1.5), and my perception could be said to have surpassed what an ordinary person was capable of having.

But I was still far from ready from entering a field. I needed money, it wouldn't be long until the Packhorse Master guild would go public.

Suddenly, a thought flashed through my mind.

Indeed, going to the Field was the most honest way of making money. I had been putting it off because my stats were lacking, but after thinking about it carefully, there was a way around it.

I could make up for my lacking stats by using the laptop to strengthen my weapon.

Just like Kim Suho, who would later use a single holy sword to sever a mountain... It seemed like the quickest way to become stronger. But it was also a huge waste of SP.

I currently had a training gun provided by Cube and 380 SP I got from destroying my potential friendship with Chae Nayun. Now, suppose I also had the famous handgun, Desert Eagle.

Even if I invested all of my SP into strengthening my training gun, it would likely only come to equal the Desert Eagle.

In other words, SP was more efficient when it modified weapons with a more powerful base performance.

“Hm...”

Speaking of the Desert Eagle, I suddenly became curious. It was the only firearm I had in my setting.

Without getting up from my bed, I turned on my smartwatch and entered a weapons dealer website.

Essential Armory.

It was an armory operated by the ‘Essence of the Strait’ guild. Since weapons above the artifact grade were sold in auctions, Essential Armory was the most popular website for factory manufactured weapons.

[Welcome to Essential Armory.]

As expected of the most popular weapons dealer website, it was well designed. The homepage showed off new items, while the top bar had categories such as sword, spear, bow, and rapier. Perhaps because mercenaries often used the website, it also had a good selection of guns.

I clicked on [category – gun].

There were different types of guns such as handgun, assault rifle, and sniper rifle. For now, a handgun suited me best since it didn’t hinder my movements. The Desert Eagle seemed to be a popular choice among handguns, as I quickly found it.

===

Desert Eagle

—Feel the transcendental power! Built into the Desert Eagle is a magic amplification device that boosts the power of magic bullets! Because of its huge recoil, the Desert

Eagle is recommended only for the most proficient sharpshooters.

*Weight: 3.5948kg (1.2938kg with weight reduction magic effect added)

*Length: 333mm

*Identification and contract required to purchase.

===

Desert Eagle. Its picture on the website looked much more beautiful than the original design. The barrel had an elegant platinum color, while a majestic eagle was inscribed on the grip. While looking like a piece of art, this weapon boasted a heavy weight and a bulky size.

Just from a glance, I could tell how powerful it was. There was just one problem.

“It’s too expensive.”

It was expensive. Its base price was 20 million won, and the price doubled when I clicked on a checkbox that said 'full attachments'. I needed the weapon to make money, so buying it almost seemed counterproductive.

“...Ehew.”

I tried to think about what to do, but my brain refused to function. My consciousness was foggy, and I felt drowsy. It seemed sleep would come to me soon.

I turned off the smartwatch without hesitation and entrusted myself to my instincts. Thinking about this could wait until tomorrow.

...When I opened my eyes back up, it was Wednesday.

Bright morning light shone through the curtain.

It was an unpleasant light no matter how many times I looked at it.

Another exhausting day had begun.

“Whew.”

With a sigh, I brushed off the negative emotions that came to me every morning. After trudging to the bathroom and getting washed, I put on my uniform and left the dorm. 10 minutes was enough for this routine.

Once outside, I saw other cadets getting ready for class. It was still early morning, but they were busy laughing and chatting. Seeing them enjoying their school life, I began to realize why I felt so lethargic.

I didn't have a friend in this world. I didn't even have someone to talk to. Being able to hang out with friends was the only thing keeping school from being boring, but I was no longer in my old world.

Should I try to look for a girlfriend?

No, I was too lazy for that. If I used too much of my emotion on needless human relationships, my condition could get worse.

Yep, I should just be content with dying alone.

With that, I quickened my pace to the classroom.



“As you know, a guild’s database contains many useful information. But most of the time, you have to reach a certain rank to get access to them.”

I thought about my weapon as I half-heartedly listened to an old professor’s lecture. The figure of a majestic eagle shimmered in front of my eyes.

How could I make the money to buy it?

The first thing I thought of was selling information.

I had designed most of the monsters myself, so I roughly knew their vital points and attributes. Since each guild had a different collection of data, if I sold them the information they didn’t have...

No, this wasn’t the best idea.

In the first place, it took 5 years for an information broker to build up his reputation. It also didn’t seem like a good idea to disrupt the world’s balance just to make some money.

“...Now, let’s continue after a little break.”

Before I noticed, break time rolled around. I immediately turned on my smartwatch to enter Essential Armory once more, but I had received an unexpected message.

[Excuse me.]

I was familiar with the sender’s name.

Rank 7, Yoo Yeonha.

Because smartwatches of cadets were connected to the Cube’s intranet, it was possible

to message other cadets without knowing their exact contact address. This was the first time I was using this feature.

Yoo Yeonha was sitting in the front row. After giving the back of her head a quick glance, I replied to her message.

[What?]

[What are you?]

What nonsense was this?

[What do you mean?]

She didn't reply for a while. I wondered where this was coming from, then remembered what I told her before. I peeked at the time. It was 1 P.M. I gave her the information yesterday and she already confirmed it was true?

[Ah, is it about that? I'm surprised you believed me.]

[What?]

[So? Wasn't I right?]

In truth, I was also dying to know whether the Mountain Tyrant's setting was unchanged. If this unknown co-author wanted to change everything I knew, I would have a tough time ahead of me.

[...Yes.]

“Whew.”

Thankfully, it seemed that wasn't the case. I breathed a sigh of relief.

[How did you know?]

[You think I'd tell you?]

Yoo Yeonha's shoulder twitched. Immediately afterwards, she returned a short reply.

[No.]

A smirk emerged on my face. When I was about to end the conversation, I remembered something.

Desert Eagle, the elegant and dignified bird of prey.

I had almost forgotten about it. The reason I gave the information to her was for times like this.

Coincidentally, Essential Armory was operated by Yoo Yeonha's guild, 'Essence of the Strait.'

[Anyways, if you benefited from the information I gave you, I'd like to ask for a favor.]

Yoo Yeonha suddenly turned around. As though she had kept an eye on my seat, she knew exactly where I was. Though her gaze was still sharp, it seemed to hold less weight.

How should I put it... Right, she looked like a big bag of money.

Chapter 17

For Growth (4)

[What do you want?]

I knew Yoo Yeonha would agree. She was the type who couldn't stand one-sided favors.

Now, I wondered I should ask for.

Asking for money didn't feel right. It was Yoo Yeonha I was talking about, but she was still a minor. She likely couldn't freely spend tens of millions of won.

[It's simple. I need a weapon.]

After sending her the above message, I sent her the link to Essential Armory's Desert Eagle.

Yoo Yeonha looked at the link I sent her and looked back up at me. She didn't seem to have any hostility.

[I think it's pretty cheap.]

[...I understand.]

Great, she agreed.

[Is it possible to get it by tomorrow?]

The quicker it was, the more money I would make. Even if tomorrow was too difficult, I hoped to get it by the end of the week.

[Yes, I'll take care of it.]

Surprisingly, she replied without hesitation, even though her parents should still be in charge of guild work. I was impressed by her decisiveness.

"Get back to your seats."

The break ended at just the right time, as the old professor resumed class after drinking some water.



Wednesday's theory class ended. And at 3 P.M., anti-personnel training began.

In a fairly large training field, each cadet met with others they promised to spar. Meanwhile, I looked for the instructor pitifully.

"Hey."

A sharp voice stabbed my ear from the back. It had to be calling me. I turned around and instantly froze. Chae Nayun was glaring at me with terrifying eyes.

She asked, "Spar with me."

The hostility in her tone bordered on killing intent.

Gulp. I swallowed a mouthful of saliva.

Like the saying, 'a word causes a debt worth a thousand gold taels,' I had made a terrifying enemy with a sentence. Indeed, Chae Nayun was too dangerous of a person to have as an enemy. In order to live a peaceful life, I had to mend our relationship even at the cost of kneeling and begging.

But looking at Chae Nayun, I fell in thought. Would she be able to forgive me for my rash insult just because I apologized?

Seeing me silent, Chae Nayun pointed at my gun and spoke.

"Your gun. Take it out."

The first training gun broke when I fought the Djinn. This was a new one. I looked down at my holster, then back up at Chae Nayun.

"I don't want to."

"...You scared?"

These two words carried a great echo, causing the eyes on the training field to fall on

us.

“Mm...”

How should I act in front of Chae Nayun?

Without a doubt, the ‘incident’ I was clueless about was well known among all cadets. The original Kim Chundong should have known about it too. So if I apologized now, it might seem like an even greater insult.

“No.”

...Furthermore, it might be better for me to remain a bad guy to Chae Nayun. My first and foremost goal and the reason I worked so hard without resting... was all to kill her older brother within a certain amount of time.

Even if I mended my relationship with Chae Nayun and even became friends, my actions would only leave her with a cruel sense of betrayal and hatred.

“I’m afraid you might get hurt. This thing uses real bullets, you see.”

Immediately, the weight of the atmosphere changed. Chae Nayun clenched her bow. I could see the amount of force she put in through the veins popping out of her hand.

“I don’t think your bullets will hurt me even if they hit.”

Chae Nayun forcefully suppressed her anger and retorted with a cold sneer. My response was simple.

“You won’t get hurt. You’ll die instead.”

“...Ha, say that again, punk.”

Chae Nayun approached me up close. She looked like she would explode at any moment. She was technically 165 while I was 174, but she seemed a lot bigger for some reason.

“Really, who do you think you are?”

The atmosphere turned for the worse and more spectators gathered to watch the fight.

At that moment...

“Chae Nayun, get back.”

The instructor stepped in. I breathed a sigh of relief, thankful that she came before it was too late. Chae Nayun turned towards the instructor.

“Why should I?”

“Before he gets a gun for sparring, no one can spar with Kim Hajin cadet.”

“But I don’t mind.”

“I mind.”

“Why—”

“Failure to heed an instructor’s order will be met with disciplinary action.”

“ ... ”

An instructor’s words were absolute. Chae Nayun clenched her teeth with a wronged look. But in the end, she gave me a final glare before leaving. The spectators also dispersed and went back to their training.

Everything had returned to normal.

“Take your gun out.”

The instructor spoke as she wrapped her hands in bandages. Her name... Park Hyun-Ah, was it? I asked the instructor.

“Does a gun for sparring even exist?”

“How the hell would I know?”

Crack, crack. The instructor cracked her knuckles and neck in front of me.

“Now, come.”

Then with a smile, she gestured with her finger.

This person... Did she enjoy this?



Thursday was the hunting club's orientation. But since cadets weren't required to go to orientations, I decided to skip it for this week. It was partly to avoid Chae Nayun, but the main reason was to test out the weapon I would receive as quickly as possible.

"Ah, I can't wait."

I was currently at Angel Box, a coffee shop near Seoul. I was waiting for an item at this place. For the record, cadets were able to use Portals 5~6 times a month as long as they filled out a form.

Time passed by. 5:29:55... 5:29:56... 5:30:00.

At exactly the promised time, the shop's door opened.

A man in a black suit and sunglasses walked in with a suitcase. After looking around for a moment, his eyes met mine. I waved my hand happily. The man's expression didn't change. Striding with his long legs, he walked up to me.

"Kim Hajin-ssi?"

"Yes, that's me."

I felt like I knew who this man was. Only one person popped up in my head when I thought about Yoo Yeonha's attendant – Jin Sechan.

The man presumed to be Jin Sechan placed the suitcase on the table without sitting down.

"Here's the item. Please take a look."

"Are you in a hurry? You can sit."

I pointed at the chair in front of me. Before I received this item, I wanted to do a quick test.

"...Hm."

He sat down without complaint.

I took out the laptop I bought from my bag. Yesterday, I made some changes to this laptop. Right, I could use the laptop to modify the laptop itself.

“Are you doing something?”

“What do you mean?”

The man tilted his head.

“Why are you tapping on air?”

“...You can't see this?”

I lifted up my laptop.

“...”

He looked at me as if I was crazy.

I see, I had a bit of a suspicion, but it seemed I was right. Only I could see this laptop.

“Haha, I'm kidding.”

That was fine with me.

I turned the laptop on. The additional setting I put into my laptop was this.

[When Kim Hajin is within 50m of a target with an altered setting, the content and summary of the change will be sent to Kim Hajin's laptop.]

[*Does not work on targets past a certain level of importance.]

The reason I added this setting was because I thought it would be more efficient if I was told about a change through an objective medium rather than having to notice it and then being told by the co-author.

Either because the co-author didn't care or because he encouraged the modification I made, I only had to pay 200 SP.

[A change in setting has been detected.]

And currently, there was an alert in the laptop as expected.

[Jin Sechan – His feelings for Yoo Yeonha has been deepened.]

I didn't mind this change.

“Anyways, I'll take a look now.”

I opened the suitcase.

Click. Click.

With an elegant sound, the case opened. A brilliant light erupted from the inside.

“...Wow.”

Sitting on top of a fancy red velvet was a platinum handgun and a magazine. It was even more beautiful than what I saw in the picture.

“As promised, it's the Desert Eagle with full attachments and a 60-round magazine of pinnacle grade magic bullets.”

“Thank you. You can go now.”

I no longer cared about Jin Sechan. Using my laptop, I checked my new weapon's setting.

===

[Desert Eagle]

[High rank] [Metal attribute]

A masterpiece handgun. Contains several added effects.

「Attack Power Amplification – 1/10」

「Low rank Weight Reduction Magic」

「Intermediate rank Recoil Control Magic」

===

===

[Magic Bullet]

[Pinnacle grade] [Null attribute]

.44 Macon steel mana bullet with condensed high-purity mana.

「Attack Power – 4/10」

===

I felt much better being able to read their descriptions.

Without having to modify the gun or the bullet, I felt like I could easily kill a low-intermediate rank monster. I should also be able to take Aether from the devil's nest in Suwon.

"Then I'll be going."

"Ah, yes, take care."

After sending Jin Sechan off, I checked the amount of SP I had left.

250.

Now, how should I spend this?



After leaving the coffee shop, Jin Sechan contacted Yoo Yeonha. She asked as soon as she picked up the call.

—Did you deliver the item?

"Yes."

—Was there anything special about him?

"That's..."

There wasn't anything "special", but there was something he found strange. No matter how much he thought about it, the man's demeanor wasn't what a 17 year old should have. Not to mention, it was almost as if he knew who Jin Sechan was...

—Yes?

"...No. There wasn't anything special in particular."

But he couldn't come to a decision with just that short exchange. After all, he was Cube's cadet. Even Yoo Yeonha had an air of dignity and elegance that didn't suit her age.

—Yes, I understand. Thank you for your work, Sechan-ssi.

“My pleasure.”

With that, the call ended.

Though he wanted to talk a little longer, he decided to be content.

Chapter 18

Connections (1)

“...170,000 won?”

My tone went up at the unexpected price.
The Portal worker retorted unfazed.

“Yes. From Seoul to Gangwondo Wonju, it’s 170,000 won.”

Unlike from Cube to Seoul, going to Seoul to Gangwondo had a price. I bought my card with me, but 170,000 won wasn’t a small amount to pay, especially now, when I was trying to save money.

“Mm...”

“Customer, there are people waiting in line.”

The female Portal worker gave a cold warning. Looking around, I could indeed see many people waiting in line. Seeing as how they each had a weapon with them, it seemed we had the same objective.

“Um... Can something be done with this?”

Before I reluctantly paid the price, I showed her my Cube Cadet Card. I remembered Kim Soohyuk saying something about Cube cadets having benefits, but because this wasn’t a setting I made, I wasn’t knowledgeable about the specifics.

“Huu...”

The Portal worker sighed as though she was annoyed but still accepted the card. But in the next moment, her eyes widened and a much brighter voice came back.

“Ah, you’re a Cube cadet. Cadets are allowed 6 free passes per month.”

“Oh really? That’s great.”

“Would you like to use one?”

“Yes.”

The Portal worker then took my wrist and stamped a seal.

I was genuinely surprised at her complete change in attitude. It seemed being a Hero really was one of the best jobs in this world.

“Thank you.”

“Yes, have a safe trip, Kim Hajin cadet-nim.”

The female Portal worker had even memorized my name.

With a bitter smile, I walked into the Portal.



Gangwondo Wonju’s scenery could be summarized with just a sentence.

“So many foreigners.”

Just like in my setting, Wonju was a global city. Although its buildings were limited in height due to the threat of monsters, the city was filled with sturdy modern structures. Foreigners of all skin color walked around with their weapons, while agency employees, who supported them, busily tapped on their tablets. They were likely calculating the price of the day’s haul.

While different from Seoul and Busan, it was indeed an unusual scene.

“We took down a good amount today. How much do I get?”

Hearing a clumsy Korean, I couldn’t help but laugh.

English and Korean were this world’s shared language. Naturally, this showed Korea’s importance and authority in the international community. While this sounded great for Korea, Korea was only a step away from hell.

The Korean Peninsula endlessly produced new Towers and Dungeons. The textbook

contained several explanations for it. There was one scientific and geological explanation that I couldn't understand, and there was also a more religious explanation that said Korea was blessed or cursed by the heaven. In truth, neither was close to the real reason.

In any case, the Korean Peninsula's numerous Towers and Dungeons produced many monsters. Had it not been for Heroes who could turn them into marketable resources, Korea would have long been destroyed.

However, the Nine Stars, who were nine of the strongest Heroes, had five members who were Korean. One of them even served as Korea's 20th President. Any further explanation wasn't necessary.

"You killed three hobgoblins, so after taxes and processing fees, it should be about 600,000 won."

Under the tax law, foreigners had to pay more in taxes. Even so, foreign mercenaries and Heroes flocked to Korea, because the hunting process was safe enough to make up for the high taxes.

If things became dangerous during a hunt, one could simply send out a distress call, and Heroes or agents would arrive in less than three minutes. Korea was the only country in the world with such a system.

"Take this. You'll feel better afterward. It's a troll blood potion."

"Ah, thank you."

Seeing the world my setting created, I walked through the streets.

The city was full of interesting things – blacksmith's workshop, potion store, alcohol bar, etc. With shops that looked like they belonged in the Middle Ages operating in modern buildings, it felt like I was in a game world.

The sentence, 'Wonju is a famous tourist city,' which I wrote without much thought, seemed to have caused this setting.

I continued walking and before I noticed, I was at the entrance of the 'Field.' There were many people already waiting nearby. I would have to go to Hamgyong Province if I wanted to hunt in a quiet place, but Hamgyong province was too dangerous for the current me.

"E-Excuse me?"

Just when I was about to enter, someone struck up a conversation. It was a tall, average-looking man with slouched shoulders and circular glasses. I didn't know him. He was likely an agent.

"Yes?"

"Are you perhaps here to hunt monsters?"

"...Are you an agent?"

"Ah, yes, here's my business card."

I took the business card for now. I didn't know who he was, but an agent was necessary to sell monsters' bodies.

But when I looked at the name and the company logo written on the business card, I doubted my eyes.

[SH Agent Head Manager, Park Soohyuk]

"...Mr. Park Soohyuk?"

"Ah, yes, nice to meet you."

The man smiled as he tidied up his shabby clothes.

Park Soohyuk. I knew who he was. Indeed, he looked similar to how I described him in my novel.

Park Soohyuk should be the most-appearing agent in the novel, as SH Agent would become Korea's greatest agency.

"Haha, you might not have heard of me. I started this work not too long ago."

But for now, he didn't seem to be doing too well.

I smiled.

Connections were one of the most important aspects of life. A person's future was often the result of ill-relationships and good-relationships one made.

As this world was still in its early stage, there were many who were currently weak but would become prosperous in the future. The best way to get close to a famous person was to become friends before that person became famous.

“SH Agent, I don’t think I’ve heard of it before...”

The only thing that bothered me was that this connection was supposed to be Kim Suho’s.

But since agents usually had multiple clients, it was probably fine.

“It feels like a trustworthy name.”

“Ha, haha, thank you.”

“Ah, by the way...”

I took out my laptop naturally and checked for any changes in Park Soohyuk’s setting. Thankfully, there were none, meaning his extraordinary ability was unchanged.

“My main weapon is a gun. Is that okay?”

“I don’t think why that would be a problem. Gun or sword, mercenary or hunter, it doesn’t matter to me! New customers are always welcome!”

Park Soohyuk put his hand out with a bright smile.



Eight bullets were loaded in my gun. Each pinnacle grade magic bullet cost about 150,000 won. Since each low-rank monster went for 300~400,000 won, I couldn’t use more than one bullet per monster due to agent fee I would have to pay.

With that in mind, I walked into the Field.

Park Soohyuk followed me from behind. It seemed he was in a desperate time considering the fact that agents without a vehicle usually waited outside the Field.

“Ah, there’s one there.”

After about 30 minutes of wandering around, we finally encountered a monster.

A large body and protruding teeth, it was a low-rank grade 9 monster called an iron

hog. The 'iron' part of its name wasn't because it was covered in iron, but because its skin was stronger than iron.

"I think we should ignore that one."

When I began to approach it, Park Soohyuk held me back. I asked.

"Why?"

"...Yes?"

Park Soohyuk's eyes seemed to say, 'Do I need to explain this too?'

"You can't kill an iron hog with a gun. Even piercing its outer skin will be difficult."

"But it's expensive."

"Yes?"

The price of a monster faithfully followed the law of a free market economy. Monsters like the undead gave no benefits and thus had no value. Consequently, monsters like these were subsidized by the government

"Even if it's expensive, attacking it isn't a good..."

"You'll just have to wait and see."

I took out my Desert Eagle and aimed it forward. The gun barrel shined under the blazing sun.

"W-W-Wait just one min—"

Park Soohyuk made a fuss in a fluster, but I didn't hesitate. I pulled the trigger. The bullet shot straight to the middle of the iron hog's head, and before the hog could even notice it, it tore through its iron-like skin. There was nothing it could do with its brain shot through. It helplessly fell down.

"Perfect."

Both the power of the weapon and my skill were satisfactory. I had struck the iron hog's vital point with pinpoint accuracy.

"...Wow."

Next to me, Park Soohyuk exclaimed in awe.

Oh, and by the way, the setting I added to my Desert Eagle was simple and effective.

===

[When a monster is one-shot killed by the Desert Eagle, its attack power is amplified.]
—Using low-intermediate rank as the standard, 1% attack power increase per kill.
—Repeated killing of same ranked monsters will slightly lower the amount of attack power increase.

===

By putting in a restriction that required me to put in an effort, I'd added a comparatively good effect for the SP I spent.

"So? Clean, isn't it?"

Once again, I felt certain about my choice of weapon. Sniping from afar without getting close, it was the perfect hunting method with low risk and low tension.

"Uh... That's a great gun! Your sharpshooting is amazing too."

"Haha, I'm flattered."

I spoke as I pointed at the iron hog's corpse.

"So how much will this go for? It looks pretty expensive."

"Well, iron hogs are already pricey and since this corpse is in such a good condition, even after the fees, it should be at least 600... no, 800,000 won."

"Wow."

"Hold on. Let me store the corpse first."

Park Soohyuk took out a pouch from his bag. It should be a magical pouch with a space expansion magic.

Seeing him struggle to put the hog in the pouch, I grabbed the hog's front leg.

"I'll help out."

"Ah, thank you."

"...This is really heavy."

But thinking about it now, my strength stat wasn't that high either.

"Uuk, uk, god."

"Wow, it really is heavy."

"Aren't you an agent? Should you have known this beforehand?"

"...You're right."

"I'll hold its hind legs. You hold the front. Wait, don't we have to carry the pouch around afterward?"

"Ah, don't worry, anything inside the pouch will have its weight cut in half."

"...Only half?"

I couldn't help but sigh. Indeed, Kim Suho only met Park Soohyuk in his third year. Park Soohyuk was in a bad state even then, so now... well, I could only be thankful that he hasn't starved to death.

"Ugh."

"Uuu."

"Come on, put more strength into it."

"Sorry, I didn't have lunch..."

After an hour of groaning and moaning, we finally managed to stuff the hog in the

pouch.

“Whew...”

I collapsed on the ground, exhausted. My strength and stamina stat had to have increased with that.

“...It’s already 7.”

Before I noticed, the sun had set and darkness had descended on the Field. A fearsome cold enveloped my body.

From the looks of it, today’s hunt would end with this one kill.

Though I felt a little regret at the huge waste of time, I wasn’t too sad since I got to make a valuable connection.

“So how do we bring this back?”

“Oh, don’t worry about that. If it looks like we really can’t, we just have to call 119^[1]. We only need to reimburse them for the trip.”

“That’s ingenious...”

We laughed together. At that moment...

“...Hold on.”

Rustle. A faint sound rang out from a tree.

“Shh.”

I took out my gun once more with my index finger over my mouth. Then, I fired at the direction of the sound.

Thud.

There was no scream. Only the sound of a beefy body crashing down rang out.

“Huh? What happened?”

“It’s a black pelican.”

“Yes?”

Park Soohyuk might not have been able to see anything, but I could see it clearly. My eyes could see a thousand miles away.

“...Black pelican?”

“Yep. Fantastic, we should take this one back too.”

1. 119 is Korea’s emergency contact number

Chapter 19

Connections (2)

Friday morning. I opened my eyes while in bed. My entire body started aching immediately.

Iron hog and black pelican... No matter how much I thought about it, the monsters I hunted yesterday were too heavy. Thankfully, I made it back before curfew. Otherwise, I would have faced disciplinary punishment on top of minus points.

“Argh.”

Fortunately, today was Friday, so there wasn't a class that required me to use my body. Getting up tiredly, I checked my smartwatch first. There were three unseen messages.

[810,130 won has been deposited.]

[450,270 won has been deposited.]

[Here is the payment for yesterday's monsters. I hope to work with you again. SH Agency Head Manager, Park Soohyuk.]

The payment was quicker than I expected. If I remembered correctly, exclusive contracts had monthly payments. Mine must have been quick because it was a one-time deal. But still, to have them taken care of overnight... he sure was quick with his work. As expected of Park Soohyuk.

Thanks to Park Soohyuk, I now had something to do for the day. I could now open up a brokerage account and buy Packhorse Master guild's stock. One million won sounded like a good start.

I walked into the shower with various thoughts in my head.

After washing away my remaining drowsiness with cold water, I dried myself, put on my cadet uniform, and headed out to class.



Friday's first period class was on 'Phenomenon Realm Analysis.' From what other cadets were saying, it seemed we were assigned the most difficult theory class since we didn't have physical training today. Of course, this didn't apply to me.

I sat down on a random seat and took out my laptop. After finding out that only I could see it, I openly fiddled around with it in class.

===

▷ 「Master Sharpshooter」

[Low-intermediate rank] [Spirit attribute] [Evolving — Grade 8] [Proficiency EXP 13%]

—Master Sharpshooter's Training

*Familiarity with all long ranged weapons

—Thousand-Mile Eyes

*Can see far away and predict a target's movement path.

*Increases speed and perception by 0.3 points.

—Bullet Time

*In combat only and once every 24 hours, you can spend 10 seconds in 'Bullet Time'.

—Sharpshooter of Reversal

*Depending on Kim Hajin's invariable stat, 'luck', you can deal bonus damage against a stronger enemy.

===

Sharpshooter of Reversal, a low ranked skill I got from defeating a Djinn, was quite decent. Master Sharpshooter had also reached grade 8. Of course, its growth speed would decrease the higher its grade went.

“Sit down.”

While I was observing my growth in delight, the professor walked in.

“There is a written exam today like I mentioned last time.”

A test was announced out of the blue. Heartfelt groans erupted from the cadets. It seemed I wasn't the only one only now hearing about this.

“Really? I didn't study at all!”

In front of me, Chae Nayun muttered in despair. Kim Suho, who was sitting next to her, promptly showed her the notes I took down yesterday. Chae Nayun coughed in embarrassment.

“Now, now, quiet down.”

The professor silenced the cadets in a heartless tone before handing out the exam sheet. After a few scuffling sounds of paper, I also received an exam sheet.

Problem 1. Describe the monster, ‘Pygmalion’.

Problem 2. Describe the Nine Evils (Djinns).

Problem 3. State the attributes that humans can manifest in the Phenomenon Realm.

Problem 4...

The problems’ difficulty and ambiguity were higher than what I had imagined. Other cadets also sighed the moment they glanced at the problems. But I was different. I had answers to all of the problems on my laptop.

[Pygmalions are Fallen Ghosts whose intelligence exceeds that of humans. They cannot be seen in the Phenomenon Realm, and they act as humans after possessing them. Because of this behavior, some argue that they should be classified as a Djinn...]

Of course, I would get the problem wrong if any of their settings were changed, but that was even better. It meant I would learn more about settings that had changed.

“...What?”

After I was almost done writing all the answers...

“What happened?”

My laptop suddenly shut down. That is, my lifeline shut down. I began to sweat from the unexpected occurrence. And because I was in the middle of an exam, there wasn't anything I could do. Then, blue words suddenly appeared on the LCD screen.

[A month has passed.]

[The laptop’s functionality will be updated.]

[Target Kim Hajin’s Observation and Reading Gift will be strengthened.]



There was a meeting on every even-numbered Fridays. Yoo Yeonha called this social leadership meeting, Noble Society.

Yoo Yeonha wanted Noble Society to be a source of vital connections once she graduated, but Chae Nayun, who was the most important connection, didn't have much thought about it. To Chae Nayun, Noble Society was like an alumni reunion, where she met with her childhood friends.

Today's Noble Society meeting was at a coffee shop in Seoul.

"How are your grades?"

"It's good enough."

"The Jonghak I know isn't content unless he gets first place."

Only Shin Jonghak and Yoo Yeonha were in the coffee shop. No other customers were present. It was a popular coffee shop, but Yoo Yeonha had talked to the owner to rent the place out.

"Like I said, it's good enough."

"...Yeah, okay."

Clang—

The bell on the coffee shop's door rang. Yoo Yeonha and Shin Jonghak turned towards the door.

It was Chae Nayun, who was wearing Chae Nayun-like clothes – blue jeans and a black jacket over a slightly see-through white shirt. She walked like a man, but her elegant figure was more charming than any other woman.

"Chae Nayun, you came today?"

Shin Jonghak waved his hand in greeting. Chae Nayun walked over and spoke after looking around the shop.

"Hey, where did your lackeys go?"

In Chae Nayun's eyes, Shin Jonghak was the type of person who liked to bring around

lackeys. These followers of Shin Jonghak were generally sons of large corporations or guilds, and despite Shin Jonghak labeling them as 'friends', the hierarchy in their relationship was clear for anyone to see.

"They're training. Midterms are soon."

"Oh, those guys also prepare for exams?"

Chae Nayun made a snarky comment and sat down.

"Rather than that, how did you do on the last written exam?"

"Are you making fun of me?"

"No, it's just that you asked whether the other guys were preparing for exams."

"...That's different. I'm talking about the combat exam. Who cares if you're good at theory..."

Unlike when he was with Yoo Yeonha, Shin Jonghak actively brought up conversation topics. Chae Nayun's replies were no different than usual.

Yoo Yeonha watched the two talk quietly. She didn't think much of it. They were just talking as friends. But the look on Shin Jonghak's face when he was talking to Chae Nayun, his soft smile, and kind eyes, didn't come to Yoo Yeonha too pleasantly.

Krrk.

Yoo Yeonha lightly clenched her teeth and grabbed the cup of coffee she ordered for Chae Nayun. Because she ordered it thirty minutes ago, it was lukewarm. She released her magic power into the cup, heating the coffee.

"By the way, do you know Kim Hajin?"

But at that moment, her focus completely scattered and her ears opened up. Yoo Yeonha inadvertently joined the conversation.

"Kim Hajin?"

"Yeah."

“...What about him?”

Chae Nayun’s face became severely distorted.

“What do you think about that bastard, Yeonha?”

Yoo Yeonha felt her heart drop. Kim Hajin. Normally, she wouldn’t have had to think about someone like Kim Hajin. Even if she did, her assessment of him would have been ‘I don’t care’ or ‘That crazy psycho.’

But the circumstance had changed.

There was something about him. She wasn’t sure exactly what, but he wasn’t so simple. But Yoo Yeonha purposefully hid her inner thoughts.

“...What do you mean? He’s just an average guy.”

“No, nevermind.”

Chae Nayun grabbed her cup of coffee roughly. Yoo Yeonha swallowed her saliva at Chae Nayun’s strange reaction.

“That bastard is hiding something for sure.”

“What are you so angry about?”

This time, Shin Jonghak asked. His face was full of smiles, as though he enjoyed seeing an angry Chae Nayun.

“You don’t know? There was a Djinn at the National Weapons Museum during the recent monster incident in Seoul. Then, that bastard...”

With that, Chae Nayun gulped down her coffee. She then immediately spurted it out.

“Aak! Fuck, it’s hot! Water! water!”

Panting, she looked for cold water. Yoo Yeonha carefully consoled her, feeling a knot in her heart being loosened.

“...Nayun, that’s coffee, not cold water.”

“You haven’t changed, have you?”

Shin Jonghak laughed, while an employee quickly ran over with cold water.

“H-Here.”

Chae Nayun quickly grabbed it and gulped it down.

“Aagh, I burned my tongue.”

Then, she caught her breath before continuing where she left off.

“Anyways, that Djinn was stronger than Kim Suho and I thought. Even I...”

At that point, Chae Nayun paused once more and watched her two listeners. Because what happened back then was embarrassing, she didn’t want to talk about it in detail.

“...Even I struggled a bit. Kim Suho’s a different story, but how can an ordinary cadet like him deal such fatal damage to a Djinn?”

“What happened exactly?”

“I don’t want to explain it in detail. Just know that he blew up a Djinn’s arm. With a gun at that! A gun! How does that make sense?”

Blowing up a Djinn’s arm with a gun. Indeed, it was hard to believe without seeing it in person.

Yoo Yeonha pondered as she rubbed her chin. She’d seen Kim Hajin fight. It was true that he was quick, but it was hard to say he had the attack power to break a Djinn’s arm.

“Ah wait.”

At that moment, Chae Nayun suddenly put on a serious tone. Her eyes looked nervous and she seemed hesitant to speak. Naturally, Shin Jonghak and Yoo Yeonha’s attention fell on her.

“Could it be that he’s... a Djinn?”

“...Nayun, if he was a Djinn, he wouldn't have attacked a fellow Djinn.”

But Yoo Yeonha quickly broke the atmosphere with a sentence.

“I guess you're right. Anyways, there's something about that guy.”

“So you're telling me you don't like him?”

At that moment, Shin Jonghak, who was listening without a word, broke his silence. Chae Nayun and Yoo Yeonha both understood the hidden meaning behind his words.

Chae Nayun pondered on how to answer. She knew Shin Jonghak's personality well. Depending on her answer, that man's future would change noticeably. After a bit of contemplation, Chae Nayun replied briefly.

“...I'm not sure, but something like that.”

Chapter 20

Connections (3)

[Updating in progress... 79%]

Currently, it was 9 A.M., Saturday.

Clearly, my laptop was still dead. It only went up by 79% in a whole day. I wondered what amazing new features it would get. On the other hand, I was dying of anxiousness as I waited.

I was staring at the laptop's update percentage when my smartwatch rang.

[Brokerage account for Kim Hajin has opened.]

“Oh, it's done!”

I was also concerned about this too. It would have been easy if I was an adult, but I was still a minor. Just like in the previous world, a minor couldn't open a brokerage account without a guardian's agreement. If I wasn't a cadet at Cube, it would have been impossible to open an brokerage account.

Now that I had an account, I immediately began to work.

First, using my smartwatch, I moved money over to my new brokerage account. One million won from the previous monster hunt and two million won that I already had, a total of three million. It was a pocket change compared to what many of the other traders had, but it was enough to get me started. I opened the stock trading program. The guild stock market operated on weekends to differentiate them from the normal stock market.

[Guild — Packhorse Master]

The Packhorse Master guild was listed on the exchange. Each stock was worth 170 won.

Since I wasn't knowledgeable about complicated things like short stock selling, short stock buying, and price fluctuation, I simply bought however much I could.

[17,647 stocks of 'Packhorse Master' guild purchased.]

It didn't take long.

But since it felt a bit weird to just leave, I looked up a stock-related forum board.

[Gathering of people who enjoy stock exchange.]

With 930,000 members, this was the biggest forum for stock-related topics.

I searched for Packhorse Master.

[List of new guilds.]

[Guilds newly listed]

[Guild market is hard nowadays ㄒㄒ None of the new guilds look promising...]

None of the posts were specifically about Packhorse Master, only mentioning it briefly.

"Well, what did I expect from an online forum...?"

I clicked my tongue and turned off the smartwatch. In this world where information was equivalent to money, even the existence of a website had to be found out through money. Thus, expert brokers did not even spare a glance at free-to-use online forums. Information guilds had their own intranets where one could buy information, and those who wished to stay secret would use something like the Violet Banquet...

"Oh, right."

Speaking of staying in secret, there was one group inhabiting the dark.

Chameleon Troupe.

First revealed halfway through the story, the Chameleon Troupe was the most powerful gang in my novel, whose members would play an important part until the late stages of the novel. The group's name was derived from a chameleon's ability to camouflage. Just like how a chameleon changed its color to hide, the Chameleon Troupe was a secretive group whose members' identities remained absolutely hidden. As of now, one seat of the Chameleon Troupe was empty. This seat would remain open for another year or two, and come to play an important role in the story.

I knew who the Chameleon Troupe's leader was and where she operated. Other than Chameleon Troupe's members, I should be the only one who knew this information.

Chameleon Troupe was a gang of criminals, but they also rejected Djinn. And in this world, Djinn were the absolute evil. If I could become Chameleon Troupe's member... well, that was unrealistic, so if I could at least become friends with its leader, I might be able to transform them into a supporting role...

Just when I was thinking such things...

"Uk!"

Completely out of the blue, an intense pain emerged on my left upper arm. It was as though a heated knife was carving my skin. Blood spurted out from my arm, hitting my widened eyes. I hurriedly pulled up my sleeve. A strange scar was being drawn on my upper arm.

"The hell..."

It was an incomprehensible scar and pain. I clenched my teeth and put my hand over the scar gushing with blood. At the same time, a tsunami of information flooded into my brain.

[This Stigma is one of the authorities of the Creator. It contains magic power.]

[One streak of Stigma will be inscribed each time your total acquired SP reaches a certain level, which is when your 'fame' increases by a level.]

[You can freely use the magic power stored inside Stigma, which will slowly regenerate over 24 hours even if depleted.]

"...Ah."

An indescribable throbbing pain rang out in my head and arm. But even in the wave of such paralyzing pain, I could clearly see the laptop screen.

[Update List]

▷'Book of Truth' has been added to the Gift, 「Observation and Reading」

.....



The weekend sky was clear and blue. The early spring weather was a chilly, but still had a bit of warmth to it. But I was unable to enjoy this beautiful day to myself, as I was summoned to go to Seoul's 'Association Tower'.

It was to receive commendation for subjugating the Djinn in the recent incident.

...Really, couldn't they just come to give it themselves?

The conferment ceremony took place at a garden in Association Tower, and many people were already gathered by the time I arrived. However, the conferment ceremony seemed nowhere close to starting. Kim Suho, Chae Nayun, and I were forced into a ceremony rehearsal because we would receive our commendations from a dignitary, but the dignitary himself was late and we were forced to wait. Because Chae Nayun was next to me, it felt like I was sitting on needles.

"...Haaam."

"Happy?"

Once. I yawned once because I was bored. But Chae Nayun, who was looking for an excuse to pick a fight, finally shot back at me. I retorted briefly.

"What."

"You've had a smirk for a while."

"..."

It was unfair that she could look so pretty while making such remarks. I planned to stay silent at first, but I suddenly remembered the reason I was here.

"You didn't forget, did you?"

"Forget what?"

Each of her words was covered in thorns. I spoke as I stared into her eyes.

"That I saved you."

“..”

She still looked angry, but she shut her mouth at a loss for words.

“That’s that and this is...”

“Stop, both of you.”

After a momentary contemplation, Chae Nayun opened her mouth to strike back, when Kim Suho cut in.

“W-What?”

“Chae Nayun, switch seats with me.”

For the record, our seats were ordered: Kim Suho, Chae Nayun, then me.

“And if I refuse?”

“Hurry.”

“No, why, I don’t want to...”

Seeing them getting all touchy didn’t feel too good.

Thankfully, their obscene(?) scuffle quickly ended, and Kim Suho replaced the seat next to me.

Kim Suho looked at me and let out a dry cough.

“Thank you for back then.”

“...What?”

I was struck dumb with amazement. I wanted to be left alone, so why was he still talking to me?

“Back at the museum, if it wasn’t for you, we wouldn’t have won.”

“No, you would have won even without me.”

If I wasn't there back then, Kim Suho might have awakened an even higher-dimensional power. Main characters always became strong through hardships and dangers.

"...No."

With that single word, Kim Suho turned his gaze back.

At that moment, an extraordinary undulation of magic power rang out.

The 'dignitary' had finally arrived.

"H-He's here. Everyone get ready!"

He was today's commendation conferrer, the Master rank Hero titled 'Wolf of Valhalla'. His shoulder-length hair was curved up slightly, and he had a well-trimmed beard uncommon for an Eastern man. The regality given off by his extraordinary appearance wasn't limited to an invisible feeling. As though a wind was blowing, each of his steps caused a thin undulation of magic power. His raw power had already reached a realm where even he couldn't fully control it.

"...Huu."

Looking around the room with his wolf-like eyes, the Master rank Hero, Yoo Sihyuk, murmured quietly.

"These fuckers telling me what to do..."

It was so quiet that only I could hear it with my Gift. With a moderate arrogance and a lethargic attitude, Yoo Sihyuk pushed back the guests flocking towards him.

He walked up to the podium commandingly. His attendants ran up and handed him a paper which listed the order of the ceremony. Clicking his tongue, Yoo Sihyuk glanced at the paper before he threw it away. His attendants took the discarded paper and ran off.

—Now, the conferment ceremony will begin.

The host announced the start of the ceremony.

—The commendation will be conferred by the rank 37 Master rank Hero, Sir Yoo Sihyuk.

As we rehearsed, Kim Suho, Chae Nayun, and I walked up to the podium. Yoo Sihyuk smirked as soon as he saw Kim Suho.

“Are you Kim Suho?”

“Yes.”

“Mm. I can see why those guys want you.”

Intense interest was reflected in Yoo Sihyuk’s eyes. With an unusual kindness, Yoo Sihyuk advised Kim Suho.

“Don’t join the Association. It might even be better to join the Vast Expanse and become a hunter. Being a Hero is nothing but a baggage of responsibility and no fun.”

“...Still, a Hero fits my personality best.”

Kim Suho revealed a clear refusal with a smile. In response, the corner of Yoo Sihyuk’s mouth twisted up.

“You’re a boring guy. Fine... And you, it’s been a while, eh?”

This time, it was Chae Nayun. When her eyes met him, she made a bitter expression.

“...It’s been a while.”

“Your father told me to take care you, but I don’t plan on doing that.”

“I... Master—”

“I’m not your master. A bow user like you think you can call me Master? Do you want to die?”

At his open reproach, Chae Nayun only stuck out her mouth in a pout. Seeing her reduced to such a pathetic state, I struggled to hold in my laughter.

“...And who are you?”

“I am cadet Kim Hajin.”

“Oh... Okay.”

That was it for me. A completely different treatment than what Kim Suho and Chae Nayun got.

It seemed indifference really was more painful than hatred.

Chapter 21

Second Incident (1)

“By risking his life to subjugate a Djinn, he has shown himself to be a model citizen... This commendation proves his excellent service for the good of society and his exemplary behavior which would motivate others. Cadet Kim Suho.”

Yoo Sihyuk handed Kim Suho the commendation certificate without adding any needless commentary. Kim Suho then took the certificate with honor and dignity.

“Chae Nayun, same as above.”

Next was Chae Nayun.

“Kim Hajin, same as above.”

Then me.

“The conferment ceremony is now over.”

With the host’s announcement, the conferment ceremony came to an end. One hour and thirty minutes of rehearsal and one hour of waiting had been reduced to just five minutes. It was so quick that I didn’t even have time to feel wronged.

“Oh, by the way...”

Yoo Sihyuk, who was about to leave the garden, suddenly stopped as though he remembered something.

“The reward for the Djinn subjugation is 15 million won. I almost forgot to tell you.”

The moment I heard that, I felt grateful for everything. To the Cube associate who forced me out of bed this morning, the one-hour thirty-minute rehearsal, and even the man who was late by an hour.

“Good luck. We’ll meet again if chance allows it.”

Yoo Sihyuk then left with a bored smile.

We saw him off with our eyes, then came down from the podium. Before we could even touch the ground, guild associates flocked towards us.

However, they were only interested in Kim Suho and Chae Nayun. No one approached me. They most likely thought I was only lucky to have been with them at the time of the incident.

But that didn’t mean I was disappointed. Such was the life of an extra.

But my face automatically reddened at the clear ostracization, and thus I quickly left the venue.



I ran away to a nearby coffee shop. After ordering a drink, I sat down and turned on my laptop.

The reason was simple. I had not checked the laptop’s new functionality yet. I didn’t have the time. Yesterday, I fainted at the pain that came with the update’s completion, and when I woke up, I was dragged to the conferment ceremony.

[Updated Features]

▷‘Book of Truth’ has been added to the Gift, 「Observation and Reading」

▷Internet has been added to the laptop.

▷Stigma.

There were three new features. The first thing that caught my attention was the second addition.

‘Internet has been added to the laptop.’

It caught my attention because it was too ordinary. After all, I could use my smartwatch to access the internet.

But it was unlikely for the laptop’s feature to be so ordinary.

I opened the internet on my laptop.

“...Aha.”

I immediately understood when I saw the ‘internet’. The internet window had rows of dull texts, but they were all too familiar.

===

[List of Currently Accessible Websites]

▷Righteous Mind

▷Violet Banquet

...

...

▷Sword of Jeremy

===

It seemed the laptop's internet also allowed me to access websites that I needed to pay to enter. It was a hacking tool in a way.

Among the numerous websites, a specific name caught my attention.

===

▷Violet Banquet

*Website for trading undisclosed information, weapons, bounties, and commissions.

*SP needed for obtaining an ID: 200

===

Violet Banquet.

It was the most famous website in the dark web. Still, it had over a million members. The real pearl of Violet Banquet wasn't the website, but its 'sellers'. Violet Banquet was only a place for them to gather.

Plentiful sellers flocked at the anonymous information, weapons, bounties, and commission trading website, which didn't care for the law. While the government knew about this underground market, they had no choice but to stay silent as this black market was frequented by almost all Heroes. As a joke, a Hero wasn't called a true Hero unless one had a Violet Banquet membership.

Naturally, one needed to pay an enormous sum to become Violet Banquet's member, but I only needed 200 SP to obtain an ID.

"Ah, there you are."

It was at that moment that a charming voice and scent flowed towards me. Just by hearing the voice, I could tell who it was. I immediately straightened my back and focused on the movement behind me.

The owner of the voice then walked over and sat down on the seat in front of me in a smooth motion.

It was Yun Seung-Ah.

“You know me, right?”

Her eyes formed an arc as she stared at me.

“You don’t?”

Yun Seung-Ah asked again. I shook my head. There were few people in this world who didn’t know ‘vice-leader Yun Seung-Ah.’

“No, I know.”

“That’s a relief. I was surprised because you suddenly disappeared. There was something I wanted to give you.”

Yun Seung-Ah handed me her business card, which was adorned with gold.

[Guild, Creator’s Sacred Grace, vice-leader Yun Seung-Ah.]

While I sat speechless looking at the business card, Yun Seung-Ah continued.

“There’s a lot I want to talk about, but unfortunately, I don’t have enough time. I spent too long looking for you, Hajin cadet-nim.”

Yun Seung-Ah giving out her business card wasn’t a simple matter. It was the first step of Yun Seung-Ah style recruiting I outlined in my novel.

“There’s something I want to ask. Can I?”

I stared at Yun Seung-Ah’s eyes. Her beautiful brown pupils were absolutely calm.

“No.”

“Did you destroy the Djinns... Hm?”

Yun Seung-Ah might look kind and graceful on media, but in truth, she was extremely cold-hearted. Even talents she eagerly brought in were thrown away if they didn't meet her expectations. Bringing in what's necessary and throwing away what isn't. Survival of the fittest was Yun Seung-Ah's true mindset, which wasn't known to the media. It was her belief that a lazy person would continue to be lazy and a person falling behind would continue to fall behind.

"Don't ask."

I gave back her business card.

"Eh? Um, Hajin cadet-nim? I think you're misunderstanding something. I'm interested in you, as the vice-leader of a rank 1 guild."

"I'm thankful for your interest, but only if that's real interest."

With what I knew about Yun Seung-Ah's personality, she should be here because I used a light attribute bullet.

The interest she had in me was only curiosity. With a single gust of wind, her interest could cool down, and she could even forget my name. So, for the sake of SP, playing hard to get would probably be more memorable.

"I'll be off. There's a lot I need to do. It's almost time for midterm exams, you see."

I got up before Yun Seung-ah. Her surprised eyes chased after me.

I quickly left the coffee shop.

What Yun Seung-Ah was thinking now was none of my business.



1 P.M.

The reward money had arrived by the time I came back to the dorm. It was a clean 15 million won, unaffected by taxes. It was clear what I had to do with it. Without hesitation, I purchased Packhorse Master's stocks. With over 100,000 stocks, I was likely a majority shareholder.

"Huhu... Ah, right."

I suddenly remembered what I didn't finish in the coffee shop. The two other features

of the update – Book of Truth and Stigma.

First, I looked at ‘Stigma.’

[You can freely use the magic power stored inside Stigma, which will slowly regenerate over 24 hours even if depleted.]

“...So how do I use it?”

There was a tattoo-like Stigma on my left upper arm. But Stigma aside, I couldn’t even wield the magic power in my body.

Furthermore, it was likely that I would never be able to wield it, as I described magic power in my novel as an “ability in which innate talent and early education is most important.”

But this was likely the reason why the co-author gave me such an irregular magic power.

“I can freely use it...?”

Since it said I could ‘freely’ use it, I thought about using it.

That was all I did.

Immediately, Stigma’s magic power became unleashed. Blue light erupted from the Stigma, enveloping my upper arm. The magic power then flowed down my veins, reaching my fingertips before shooting out and manifesting into shapes. First, it formed a triangle, then a circle, then a blade.

Its mysteriousness multiplied when I thought about the Book of Truth.

The magic power branched together and formed a single book. The book’s cover waved as though it was made of water. I glanced at my veins, which had turned blue, and the strange book that had formed in the air.

At that moment, a strange voice rang out in my ear.

[This book contains truth. Ask it anything. It will answer as long as you have enough magic power.]

“...So that’s how this works.”

The words, “as long as you have enough magic power”, hung on my mind, but it was undoubtedly a great Gift.

When I was about to ask it something as a test...

Wiing— Wiing— Wiing—

An emergency alarm rang out on my smartwatch.

The sound was similar to a phone's disaster alert, it couldn't be ignored. I put my magic power away and turned on my smartwatch.

[Looking for the last person who has last seen World class' novice cadet, 'Jin Hajung']

[Looking for the last person who has last seen World class' novice cadet, 'Jin Hajung']

I immediately knew what was happening.

The next arc had begun. The name of this arc was 'Cube's Serial Disappearance Incident'. As the word 'serial' suggested, there would be six victims during the course of this arc.

This arc played a fairly important role in the story.

The sole reason being that Yoo Yeonha was the final victim. This was the decisive trigger that would bring Kim Suho and Yoo Yeonha closer together.

[Hello.]

Speaking of the devil, Yoo Yeonha suddenly messaged me.

[What?]

[The text from just now, that isn't your doing, right?]

Was she insane?

[No, why?]

[Then nevermind.]

[Alright.]

[By the way, I heard you fought a Djinn last week.]

[...What are you trying to say?]

Changing the topic over and over again until the other side brought up the topic she wanted to talk about, that was Yoo Yeonha's specialty.

[Do you know about the Giant Swamp Soldier?]

I couldn't help but laugh. It seemed she wanted me to tell her its vital point.

The Giant Swamp Soldier was a high-rank monster known for its 30m height. Just like its name suggested, it was rare sight in Korea, as Korea didn't have large swamps. By the looks of it, her guild must have gotten information about its location.

[I wouldn't tell you even if I knew.]

There shouldn't be many guilds in the country who knew about the Giant Swamp Soldier's vital point.

[I can buy the information.]

[No.]

I cut her off resolutely. Mountain Tyrant was enough to serve as her 'accomplishment'.

[Why not? I can offer a lot.]

It was true that Yoo Yeonha would become successful in the future, but her personality had yet to change. Currently, she didn't hesitate to mercilessly cut down her enemies. Before the right influence changed her temperament, it was dangerous to give her wings.

[To be completely honest, I don't know. How would I know the vital point of a monster that doesn't appear in Korea?]

And this was true. Although I was this world's author, there were things I didn't know. While I created the Giant Swamp Soldier, I only gave it a rough sketch. Since it was a golem type monster, I only thought that an attribute that countered swamps would work well against it. I never wrote any specific details down.

After not replying for a long time, Yoo Yeonha ended the conversation with a single

message.

[From now on, don't talk to me so casually.]

“Pfft.”

A smirk emerged inadvertently.

As I thought, even if Yoo Yeonha acted adult-like...

“...Still a high schooler, huh.”

She was still only 17.

Chapter 22

Second Incident (2)

===

「Information Agency – Truth」

Welcome.

If you are here to look for true information, visit the following room.

¿Room of Inquiry?

[]

Write your question in the above empty space. As long as it meets the following guidelines, it will be answered.

—Condition 1. Naturally, only answers known by the agency will be answered. If we do not know the answer to a question, we will say so, so do not worry.

—Condition 2. We cannot give an answer about a person with just his or her name. We require the person's name, picture, physique, identity, and other personal information.

—Condition 3. We cannot answer questions that are too trivial. For example, “I lost my cat. Where is it?” is not an acceptable question.

However, the same question can be answered if the scope of the question is narrowed down with specific details.

*Note 1. The minimum cost is 100,000 won but is subject to change drastically depending on the question.

*Note 2. Please keep in mind that replies will come quicker if you use respectful language and expression.

*Note 3. The information we provide is all true. Thus, we cannot refund your purchase.

*The above cost and conditions are subject to change at any time.

===

“This seems good enough.”

I looked at my laptop proudly. This was the form I submitted to Violet Banquet as an information seller. Now that I had a Gift like the Book of Truth, it felt like a waste to not use it.

For now, I gave it a grandiose name – ‘Truth Agency’.

Since reputation played a huge role in Violet Banquet, I didn’t expect to get many customers to begin with. It was perfect since I didn’t think my magic power would last long anyways.

But in 2~3 years, Truth Agency’s name would surely spread among the members, starting from small interest like ‘Why is this still here?’ or ‘Should I give it a test since I’m bored?’

Since I would have three or four streaks of Stigma by that time, I wouldn’t need to worry about running out of magic power either.

It was a risk-free, long-term investment for the future. If it worked, great. If it didn’t, that was fine too.

“Okay.”

After looking over the form one more time, I pressed the [apply for seller] button.

Now, everything was taken care of.

The only thing left to do was my daily work out.

I stretched and stood up.



Late night, Sunday.

Kim Suho was working out at the Novice Fitness Center. Kim Suho was a regular visitor of the fitness center, but today’s scenery was different than what it was at the beginning of the year. Today, the fitness center was booming with cadets. It was undoubtedly because the midterm exams were coming up.

“Kuu.”

After finishing a set, Kim Suho looked around the place while resting. Jin Hanjun, Kim Horak, Shin Jonghak, and even Yoo Yeonha and Rachel, who were rare visitors, were there.

“Are you checking out girls?”

At that moment, a sudden coldness touched his face. Kim Suho pulled his head back in surprise. There was only one person who would play such a prank on him. Kim Suho glared at him. Yi Yeonghan shrugged and handed him a drink.

“So, are you?”

“No, I just...”

“Yeah?”

“...I just thought it was a rare sight.”

Kim Suho pointed at Rachel with his chin. Yi Yeonghan looked at Rachel and nodded in agreement.

“I guess you’re right. This is the first time I’ve seen a real princess working out at a fitness center.”

Blonde hair that glistened brilliantly and eyes that were like refined emeralds. Her figure showed no imperfections and flaunted elegance and charm.

Even while covered in sweat, she looked like she came out of a painting. The girl, Rachel, was from England’s royal family and was the descendant of a noble lineage.

“Who do you think she’ll marry in the future? Not with us, right?”

At Yi Yeonghan’s comments, Kim Suho smiled.

“Is that a sneer? What, you think you can marry her?”

“No, it’s not that. I was agreeing with you. I don’t think she’d marry someone like us.”

“Uuk!”

While the two of them joked with each other, a sudden loud grunt grabbed their attention.

“Huuuk!”

The strange breathing sound came from a man having a life-or-death battle with a fitness equipment. However, the weight on the equipment was a pitiful amount by any cadet’s standard.

“...Is he really struggling with that?”

Yi Yeonghan looked with pity.

It wasn’t just Yi Yeonghan. Almost every cadet snickered as they walked about. Kim Suho couldn’t tell whether Kim Hajin was oblivious or too focused to notice, but he continued his struggle resolutely.

“At least he’s doing it for a long time.”

Kim Suho replied briefly.

“Please, with that weight, I can do the same thing for half a day. I’m curious how he was even admitted to Cube. Even sharpshooters have a minimum physical requirement they need to meet, and wasn’t he a swordsman before? Why don’t I remember him?... Oh, look, it’s Chae Nayun.”

Chae Nayun came out of the gravitation room at just the right moment. Covered in sweat, she was slightly staggering with an exhausted face.

It looked like she was planning on heading straight back, but when she saw Kim Hajin, she stopped and began to glare at him.

Jiing— Two laser beams shot out of her eyes.

“...What’s she doing?”

“They’re not really on good terms.”

Kim Suho smiled bitterly.

“Tsk.”

After glaring at Kim Hajin for a while, Chae Nayun clicked her tongue and turned back. At the same time, her eyes met Kim Suho. She let out a dry cough as though she was

embarrassed and walked towards them.

“Hey, Kim Suho, isn’t he a bit strange?”

What nonsense was she spouting now?

“...Strange?”

“That bastard, he’s acting.”

“What are you talking about?”

Both Yi Yeonghan and Kim Suho furrowed their brows. They didn’t understand what Chae Nayun was saying, but Chae Nayun glared at Kim Suho as though he was being dense.

“...I can understand Yi Yeonghan saying this, but Kim Suho, you really are insensitive about these kinds of things.”

“What? What are you talking about out of the blue?”

“You saw him that day and you still don’t get it?”

In truth, Chae Nayun’s suspicion was justified.

Magic power was one of the most important abilities of a Hero. In that sense, the magic power Kim Hajin displayed during the Seoul Incident was abnormal. An explosion of magic power strong enough to dye the world white for an instant...

A man with such level of magic power was struggling to lift a tiny weight?

It just didn’t make sense.

As such, Kim Hajin had to be acting for whatever reason.

...Although the logic behind it wasn’t perfectly sound, it was still a justifiable suspicion.

“Hm...”

Yi Yeonghan stared at Kim Hajin once again.

His face was red as though it was about to explode.

“If that’s acting, he should get an Oscar.”

“Ehew. Whatever, stay dense, you two.”

Right when Chae Nayun was shaking her head in disappointment, three male cadets approached Kim Hajin. Kim Suho instinctively frowned. Those three were well-known delinquents.

“Hey, what are you doing here, loser?”

“Look, he’s struggling with this. I only need a finger to lift this.”

They nudged Kim Hajin, but he didn’t react in any way. Without giving them a single glance, he focused on working out.

“Hey, are you mute? Say something.”

“Let’s take pictures of this son of a bitch and post it. Look at him, working all hard when he’s a complete waste.”

Aggravated, the three delinquents began to curse openly. Why live; you’re a waste of money; I feel bad for your parents; you’re not going to graduate anyway, so why not just leave; etc...

“...Hey, I’m leaving.”

Watching this scene, Chae Nayun left the scene looking uncomfortable. Kim Suho got up, unable to hold himself back, but Yi Yeonghan stopped him.

“What?”

“Just leave him be. By the looks of it, they’re Shin Jonghak’s lackeys. Nothing good will come of fighting them.”

“But still...”

“Plus...”

Yi Yeonghan smiled as though he found the situation funny.

“Who knows? Maybe he really is acting.”

†

When I woke up, it was Monday morning. In a daze, I thought back to what happened yesterday. Applying as an information seller on Violet Banquet, buying stocks, and working out...

Let's shower first.

Chwaaa—

Cold water washed away my drowsiness.

I looked at my wet body in the mirror.

My body had certainly improved. My shoulders and biceps were vitalized, my abdominal muscles were well-defined, and my thighs were rock-hard. It was a robust and healthy body that I could have never achieved on Earth. I wondered, how were my stats looking like?

After drying myself, I left the bathroom and turned on my laptop.

===

[Strength 1.835]

[Stamina 1.945]

[Speed 2.15]

[Perception 3.055]

[Vitality 1.765]

[Magic power 1.315]

===

As expected, I had grown a lot. Of course, it was still at the level of ‘a man who worked out diligently’, but at this rate, it wouldn't be long until I could take Aether from Gari Mountain.

After all, the real reward of the Gari Mountain Dungeon wasn't the ‘completion reward’, but the ‘hidden stage reward’.

Wiing—

Wiing—

I turned on my smartwatch before heading out to class and was immediately greeted

by anonymous messages.

[Retard.]

[Hey, coward, get ready to have your spine broken in the upcoming combat exam. I'll disable you and...]

“These guys again.”

It seemed I was the target of bullying. I had an idea who the instigator was, but I couldn't be sure.

But of course, something of this level wasn't enough to damage my 26-year-old mind. After all, I had suffered through Korea's military service. Just like the saying went, it was just kids being kids.

After blocking the two fools who messaged me, I walked outside.

But there were words written on the nameplate outside my door.

Retard, loser, pushover... There was one more but the handwriting was too bad for me to recognize.

They seemed to have been carved with magic power to avoid being detected by CCTV. For now, I really couldn't do anything about it. Since classes would begin in ten minutes, I had to hurry before I was late.



I opened the classroom door.

“Oh, you're here, loser?”

Immediately, some kid I didn't even know the name of struck my head.

I was starting to get a bit annoyed. Sure, it was just kids being kids, but I made sure to remember their faces. Jokes on you, the more you bully me, the more my SP increases!

“What? You mad?”

I didn't respond. Kim Hyuksoo. I memorized his name and ignored him.

I walked past a few more sneering cadets and sat down on my usual seat. At that moment, my eyes met Chae Nayun. But she didn't show the same hostility as before. She looked at me somewhat bitterly before turning away.

“Hey guys, the exam results are out for Phenomenon Realm Analysis.”

At that moment, Yi Yeonghan walked in with an armful of large scrolls. Cube still had a traditional custom. The results of every written exam, whether small or big, were posted publicly on large posters. Yi Yeonghan put up the posters while other cadets groaned.

The result was as such.

Rank 1. Kim Hajin

Rank 2. Rachel

...

Snap.

A sound similar to a chopstick snapping in half rang out. I snuck a peek behind me. Two halves of a pen rolled on the table. Next to them was the presumed owner of the pen, Rachel, who was staring at the exam results in a daze. Her mouth was half-open, as though she was shocked greatly.

“...Oh, right.”

It was then that I remembered a setting I had forgotten about.

For every written exam, whether small or big, Rachel had never been pushed out of first place.

Chapter 23

Second Incident (3)

Cube's classes and exams were always carried out in Korean. Even the small number of Cube's foreign professors held their classes in Korean, though their pronunciation and linguistic ability were no different than native speakers'. With Korean becoming the shared language of many countries, learning Korean became an important part of many countries' culture.

But a foreign language was still a foreign language. Just because Korean became a shared language, it didn't mean that learning it was any easier. To foreigners, Korean was still a difficult language to master.

But even with the disadvantage of being a foreigner, Rachel could understand what the professors were saying and could write mostly correct answers on exams. It was easy to see how much effort she put into studying.

As a country's royalty, she put in the effort to maintain a certain level of elegance and dignity. She wanted to become the perfect Hero in both theory and combat, and write a textbook for the English Royal Hero Academy.

Naturally, the citizens of England were fanatical when it came to Rachel. They were proud, saying that it was finally time for a Master rank Hero to come out of England.

'Master' rank Hero referred to top 70 of the world's most brilliant Heroes. Currently, 33 of these 70 Heroes were Korean, while 18 were American and 9 were Chinese. Only 2 were from England, but even that was arguable, as they obtained Korean citizenship 15 years ago.

As such, the citizens of England kept their eyes out on any news regarding Rachel, who they hoped would become the symbol of their nation.

To respond to their expectations, Rachel did not sleep more than two hours a day. But the 'record' she maintained through all this effort was broken today.

Rachel wasn't sad, only apprehensive and apologetic. Of course, the result of a single written exam was unlikely to spread to England, but 'Phenomenon Realm Analysis' was a difficult topic even for her. The gap between her and first place would likely not change for a while.

“...”

At that moment, Rachel felt a gaze looking at her. It was from an average-looking man. She didn't know his name, but she felt the gazes of other cadets falling on the man. Immediately, Rachel realized that this man was Kim Hajin. The man turned back to face the front of the class, but Rachel remembered his face.

Rachel began to covet the notebook he had in front of him.



There was a slight uproar at the fact that I got first place on the 'Phenomenon Realm Analysis' written exam, a topic widely known to be one of the most difficult at Cube. Rachel didn't say much, but the professor personally praised me despite Monday's professor being different than Friday's professor.

“I also looked at Kim Hajin cadet's answer sheet. His knowledge and vision were impressive to say the least. I hope other cadets can learn his passion for studying. Once again, theory is very important.”

That was what the professor said. From my perspective, it couldn't have been more uncomfortable.

In any case, I quickly left the moment classes ended. I had a lot to do today. No, I had a lot of SP to spend.

I couldn't hoard SP anymore if I wanted to protect myself from upcoming events. Now that the second arc had begun, Cube was no longer a safe place. Several Djinn should have already laid traps within the academy.

To briefly explain about Djinn, a Djinn was a human who formed a contract with a devil. In exchange for a human's soul, a devil gave him power. Naturally, higher ranked devils gave stronger powers.

But if an ordinary human formed this contract, he would only become a demi-Djinn, a puppet without intelligence. The 'Dog of Lucius' from the museum was an example of

this type.

Thanks to Lucius' magic power, the man had gained enough power to combat Kim Suho, but losing his sanity to rage, he couldn't even accomplish the mission his master gave him. If he ignored Kim Suho and killed his intended target, Lucius would have been satisfied.

Thus, even if it was more difficult to achieve, devils favored people whose bodies had ample magic power and vigor, yet underdeveloped mental power. Naturally, cadets were the perfect targets.

As such, I felt the need to prepare another weapon. If I encountered a Djinn in my current state, I had no hope of surviving.

"Hm..."

I sat on my desk and stared at my laptop.

For now, I planned to add a setting to the Desert Eagle. I had a lot of SP thanks to Chae Nayun's or Shin Jonghak's effort.

[Transformation function added to Desert Eagle. Handgun to 12-gauge shotgun]
—Condition: Requires Stigma's magic power.

Handgun and shotgun. It didn't take a genius to figure out that a shotgun was much more powerful. Furthermore, the power of a shotgun increased the closer one was to a target.

There was no mechanism that magically transformed a handgun into a shotgun, but could such a miraculous technology be achieved with my Setting Intervention?

[Transformation function added to Desert Eagle. Handgun to 12-gauge shotgun]
—Condition: Requires Stigma's magic power.
—Amplifies attack power by a maximum of 100% depending on your distance to the target

[250SP will be used. Would you like to save?]

Indeed, a miraculous technique had appeared here and now.

The laptop modified what I wrote to be more detailed and told me the cost. 250SP was a reasonable price. Without hesitation, I hit [save].

In an instant, a metal colored current of air shot out of the laptop and enveloped the Desert Eagle. The gun shined in a grey hue before subsiding. I picked it up and looked around to see whether anything had changed, but the design was the same as before.

I poured Stigma's magic power into the handgun. Immediately, the handgun began to dismantle itself.

Kiriik— With a robotic sound, the magazine split, and the gunstock and gun barrel began to elongate. Soon, the Desert Eagle took on a new form that was no longer that of a handgun.

Two platinum colored barrels the size of my arm lied in parallel, looking clean and elegant.

“...It'll surprise them for sure.”

I didn't know much about shotguns, but the Desert Eagle's destructive power had surely gone up with this modification.

Click— I opened the magazine, which was empty. To fully load it, I needed .12 inch bullets. I would have to buy the appropriate size bullets or modify the ones I had. This could wait until later.

With that, I was done with modifying my weapon, but there were still things to do.

Creating an Art.

The dictionary meaning of Art was a skill at doing a specific thing, typically acquired through practice. For example, a painter had an Art for drawing and a singer had an Art for singing.

The difference between an Art and a Gift was that an Art did not produce supernatural effects in response to magic power.

▷Arts (0/3)

X

I could create three arts. For now, I had one in mind.

===

[Parkour]

—Can ride walls with rapid movement and can freely move through obstacles through running, jumping, and climbing.

—Speed and application of the Art is proportional to the speed stat.

===

Parkour: ‘Positioning’ was the most important factor determining the life or death of a sharpshooter. Naturally, parkour was the perfect skill for any sharpshooter.

My laptop kindly modified my vague sentences.

===

「Art」

[Parkour] [Proficiency 0%] [Low rank]

—Grants flexible and shrewd movement.

—Is not affected by terrain features and can use terrain features like walls and obstacles to freely run, jump, and climb.

—Speed and application of the Art depends on the strength and speed stat.

===

[350SP will be used. Would you like to save?]

I would have shuddered at the cost if it wasn’t for recent events. Now, my SP was going up by 2 every hour even without doing anything. I pressed [save] without hesitation and got up.

Now that I made new changes, it was time to test them.

†

Tiriring— Tiriring—

I opened my eyes at the sound of the alarm. My entire body ached. I more or less expected it after I rode walls and trees until 4 A.M, but I was having too much fun to stop.

“Argh, my joints...”

I climbed walls using the tiniest cracks and leaped up trees using the smallest

protrusions. Every time I landed, excitement coursed through my veins and my body experienced a runner's high. Furthermore, looking down from a lofty height gave me a refreshing sense of ecstasy.

"...God damn it."

I had to go to class now. Combat training would begin again starting from today. Since midterms were coming up and Djinnns would start to get active, the combat training was likely to be hell.

[This message is for all cadets ㅍㅍ. Has anyone seen Seungyeon from World class? I haven't been able to contact her since yesterday ㅍㅍ]

Looking at my smartwatch, I could tell that a second victim had appeared.

There wasn't anything I could do about the Djinn.

Of course, I knew the identity of the Djinn and his next victim. But if I exposed him (though how I would do that was another question), I was afraid the story would become too distorted.

"...Huu."

I sighed. Just because his victims were fated to die, it didn't make me feel any less guilty when I was leaving them be. I didn't see what was happening in this world as just another page in a novel.

"...Why can't Yoo Yeonha just be kidnapped first?"

Through this arc, Kim Suho and Yoo Yeonha would come to form a meaningful relationship. Yoo Yeonha would be influenced by Kim Suho, becoming less temperamental, and Kim Suho would obtain the connection known as Yoo Yeonha.

But there would be four more victims until Yoo Yeonha is kidnapped.

Chapter 24

Mock Dungeon Trial (1)

Cube had a variety of artificial terrain created to allow for more efficient training: mountains, hills, limestone caves, volcanic caves, etc. Each environment had its unique puppet monsters, and naturally, there were also artificial Dungeons created with cutting-edge magic technology.

“Today’s combat training is a bit special.”

Just like Kim Soohyuk said, there were two classes participating in today’s combat training. We were gathered outside of an eerie cave. The black tunnel-like entrance seemed to ooze ominous energy.

And indeed, the cave was full of traps and puppet monsters. Among them would be real monsters and lethal traps set up by Djinn.

I could already feel myself trembling.

“Today, you’ll be entering this cave with another class. As a joint training exercise, a team from each class will join together to form a single team.”

The name of this training was Mock Dungeon Trial. Cadets would form a team of eight and experience an artificial Dungeon.

Two hundred cadets would be inside this massive grade artificial Dungeon, so one could only imagine just how large it was.

“Now, get in your usual teams.”

I looked for Yoo Yeonha, who was staring at the cave entrance nervously. The fact that Yoo Yeonha was nervous showed how threatening the Dungeon’s entrance seemed.

“I’m shaking.”

“Me too. Look, I have goosebumps on my arms.”

Jin Hoseung and Hazuki approached, making a fuss. Other cadets also found their

teams, and 200 cadets quickly formed into 50 groups.

“Next, we’ll announce your team pair. For the record, the cadet with the highest grade was chosen to be the team leader.”

Kim Soohyuk pressed his smartwatch, projecting a hologram of the team list.

===

[Team 1]

Veritas class – Team Kim Suho

World class – Team Jo Yoon-Ah

===

Kim Suho became teams with a girl named Jo Yoon-Ah. On a side note, Jo Yoon-Ah was a generic filler character, whose sole role was to act haughty in front of Kim Suho before coming to realize his greatness.

But would the co-author allow it?

I approached Jo Yoon-Ah.

[Jo Yoon-Ah — Has a worse personality]

Thankfully, that was the only change. I prayed for Kim Suho who would suffer under her torment.

===

[Team 2]

Veritas class – Team Shin Jonghak

World class – Team Kaine

===

I didn’t know much about Team 2. To be honest, I had never heard of Kaine.

===

[Team 3]

Veritas class – Team Chae Nayun

World class – Team Sven

===

“Hu...”

Team 3, which was formed just like in the novel's scenario, was the team to watch out for.

'Sven' was a dangerous character. On the outside, he was an international student from Germany who had a crush on Chae Nayun.

Sven was a star student in his country, who had walked on the path of an elite since he was young. On his plane ride to Korea, he likely imagined himself to be on the top of Cube's rankings.

But unfortunately, Cube was filled with heaven-defying characters. Sven couldn't come close to their talents, and now he was struggling with an inferiority complex and a sense of defeat.

His pent-up frustration would explode during this Dungeon trial.

The result?

Sven would come to sell his soul to a Djinn.

But that wouldn't happen today. He would only choose to form a contract after struggling with the decision for a day.

...At least, that was what was supposed to happen.

But my laptop was clearly alerting me of a change in his setting.

[Sven – Mental weakness intensified. Significantly increased chance of falling to a devil's servant during the Mock Dungeon Trial.]

The key word was 'during'. It meant that the incident would happen today.

This was a very serious problem.

I stared at Team 3.

"H-Hello, Nayun. I saw you in the hunting club."

Coincidentally, Sven reached his hand out to Chae Nayun at that moment. His eyes were full of affection, but Chae Nayun replied with an apathetic look.

"Ah, yes, how old are you?"

"I, I'm the same age as you."

Other teams were being announced in the meanwhile, but my entire attention was

concentrated on Sven. I wanted to advise Chae Nayun to not treat him so rudely like she normally did with others.

“Team 8. Veritas class, Team Yoo Yeonha. World class, Team Jayden.”

At that moment, Team 8 was announced.

I felt like I had heard of Jayden before. I immediately looked him up on my settings book. Because he didn't play an important role in the story, there was only a quick summary of his character.

[Jayden]

A typical strong in front of weak, weak in front of the strong character. About 7.5/10 in potential. Strong enough to get scouted by Essence of the Strait.

“Hello~ Haha.”

Jayden approached us with a hearty laugh. He had a generic Western look with deep brown eyes and a tall nose.

At the same time, an alert popped up on my laptop. Jayden's setting had also been changed.

[Jayden – Potential increased from 7.5 to 8.]

His potential had increased by a whole 0.5 points. Potential was a number I assigned to characters to easily estimate their overall potential. It wasn't a number that was a part of this world.

Obviously, Kim Suho's potential was 10 as a main character's potential should be, while Chae Nayun's was 9.5.

Even if one worked their entire life, it was impossible to catch up to this 0.5 point difference. This showed just how important the potential rating was. And now, Jayden's potential had increased by a whole half a point.

“You must be Yoo Yeonha! It's great meeting you. I've heard a lot about you!”

“Ah, yes, nice to meet you.”

Jayden held out his hand. I wondered if Yoo Yeonha would shake someone's hand in her first meeting. My question was answered in the next moment, as Yoo Yeonha readily took his hand.

“Next to me in order is Kim Jingyu, Oh Soojung, and Lee Shaung.”

“This is Jin Hoseung, Hazuki, and Yi Hajin.”

“...?”

For a moment, I doubted my ears. Who’s Yi Hajin? Was she doing this on purpose? I’m Kim Hajin.

In any case, Yoo Yeonha talked to Jayden affectionately while his teammates also listened in. I had no way of knowing whether she had already determined Jayden to be someone with potential and was managing her image, but it was an interesting sight nonetheless.

“I’m a sharpshooter. My main weapon is a bow.”

“Mine’s my fist.”

“Mine is a shield.”

Kim Jingyu, Oh Soojung, and Lee Shaung introduced themselves. Hazuki, Jin Hoseung, and I then introduced ourselves.

“Swordsman. Typical, right?”

“I use an axe.”

“...I use this.”

I held up the training handgun.

Although I had my Desert Eagle, which was a much better weapon, cadets were prohibited from using personal weapons in exams to test their pure abilities.

Of course, I had my Desert Eagle stored in a convenient place - inside Stigma.

Since I could use Stigma’s magic power as I willed, creating an extradimensional space to store the Desert Eagle wasn’t hard to do.

“Ah, you’re that guy. The guy who chose a gun. I heard about you.”

“It feels strange seeing you in person.”

The three people's eyes kindled with interest, but as the target of their interest, I couldn't say it was a pleasant feeling, as their eyes seemed to say, "I'm at least better than this guy".

"Are you wasting your Gift? Or is your Gift not good enough?"

...But that was still better than brute honesty. I turned towards the source of the voice. As expected, Jayden was smiling slyly.

No one in my team, if it was only in name, defended me. I didn't expect much from Yoo Yeonha, but Jin Hoseung and Hazuki didn't say anything either.

It was a bit disappointing, but I understood why. The rumors about me going around Veritas class wasn't at a joking level.

Things like using my position as Cube's cadet to blackmail or rape a girl, all the while staying quiet at Cube since everyone else was stronger, and going to Seoul every weekend enjoy women and drink alcohol...

I was practically a societal evil.

And after today, these rumors would surely spread to other classes. I didn't know whether to laugh or cry. Well, at least my SP would go up a lot.

"Everyone, get ready."

Team assignment had ended before I noticed, and cadets quickly began to move at Kim Soohyuk's words.

"Go in one by one starting from Team 1."

"Let's go!"

Kim Suho shouted valiantly and took lead. Jo Yoon-Ah followed after him with an annoyed face.

"Yoo Yeonha-ssi, I heard you were number one among this year's supporters."

"Haha, really? I heard a lot about Jayden-ssi. I think the instructors balanced the teams wrong. We're too much at an advantage."

“No, that’s just how teams are. When there’s one exceptional person... I’m sure you know the rest. It’s easy to see that Yoo Yeonha-ssi has a baggage to carry.”

Meanwhile, Yoo Yeonha and Jayden chatted. Even from my perspective, Jayden did a good job not going too far and keeping Yoo Yeonha pleased. He was a good talker unbecoming of a high schooler. Maybe I should have approached Yoo Yeonha the same way.

“Team 8, enter.”

Kim Soohyuk signaled our team’s turn.



The eight of us walked through the cave. The formation was perfect. Three warriors in the front, supporters in the second row, sharpshooters in the third, and a single warrior in the final row.

After walking for a while, we arrived at a fork. There were eight paths to choose from.

“Which path should we take?”

Yoo Yeonha spoke to me for the first time today.

“Jingyu, what do you think?”

Jayden also asked his sharpshooter. Once again, sharpshooters often acted as pathfinders.

“I don’t know.”

“Take the sixth path.”

I walked up and stood in front of the sixth path. However, the sixth path would likely be difficult. In truth, the difficulty of the paths was in order.

In other words, the sixth path had a level 6 difficulty.

But Chae Nayun should have chosen this path, so I had no other choice. If Sven contracts a Djinn here today, Chae Nayun wouldn’t be able to handle him alone.

“Let’s take the sixth path.”

No matter what, I couldn’t lose a righteous character with a 9.5 potential. Not only would the future story become a mess, it would also be a huge loss for this world.

“Huh? Who are you to tell us where to—”

“Just do as he says.”

Yoo Yeonha interrupted Jayden. It was nice to know I was trusted as a pathfinder.

“He might look like that, but his eyes are exceptional.”

“Look like what? Do you have to put it that way?”

“...I’m praising you.”

In any case, our team walked into the sixth path.

The path was completely silent with only dry wind from the entrance hitting our back. After ten minutes of walking in high tension...

We finally discovered a target.

“In front, there’s a monster.”

Flashing its terrifying eyes and flickering its tongue was a monster known as the Salamander. By the size of its body, it seemed to be low-intermediate rank at best. But monsters that could wield the four elements (water, wind, earth, fire) were tricky to deal with, and Salamanders used the most destructive element, fire.

“You can see it?”

Yoo Yeonha asked.

“It’s a Salamander. That should be the switch.”

Once we defeat the Salamander, the scenery should change. A Dungeon was an extradimensional space created with magic power. It might look like a cave at first, but once the switch was pulled, the interior could change completely. More often than not,

a Dungeon's switch was a specific monster.

"...You can really see? I don't believe you."

Jayden muttered in doubt.

"I'm telling you about it because I can see it. Just listen to me, jackass."

He was starting to get on my nerves.

"What did you say?"

"...Tsk. Quiet, both of you. Get ready for battle."

Yoo Yeonha sighed audibly as she held up her whip.

Chapter 25

Mock Dungeon Trial (2)

“Salamander? Does anyone here have the water attribute?”

Jayden asked as he stretched, but there was no 17 year old cadet who had accepted the mana of water. At the very least, one had to have undergone enlightenment to do so. It seemed Jayden didn't expect much, as he held up his sword without being disappointed.

“Well, I'm sure it'll be easy.”

I also took out my handgun. A Salamander of that size should be low-intermediate rank grade 6.

Eight people were more than enough to kill it. But what worried me was how easy it seemed.

The team members walked forward with their senses heightened.

“Oh, there it is.”

Jayden pointed at the Salamander loafing around on the ground.

“...So you were right. I guess it's true you can find dog turd if you want to use it for medicine.”

“It's the other way, retard.”

Jayden glared at me but quietly asked Kim Jingyu.

“Wasn't I right?”

“About what?”

“The Proverb. That you can find dog turd if you want to use it for medicine.”

“It’s the opposite, you can’t find dog turd even if you want to use it for medicine.”

“...Oh.”

After realizing his mistake, Jayden glanced at Yoo Yeonha, fearful that he had disappointed her. But Yoo Yeonha seemed uninterested in our conversation, as she imbued her magic power into her whip and prepared for battle.

“Get ready. Though, if it’s a switch, it should be a piece of cake. Huup!”

Yoo Yeonha swung her whip, which shot towards the Salamander’s tail like a snake.

“Kueek—”

With its tail tied up by Yoo Yeonha’s whip, the Salamander couldn’t use its most powerful attack, firebreath.

Immediately afterwards, Kim Jingyu shot an arrow at its eye, while the warriors rushed forward to cut its skin.

In the blink of an eye, the Salamander was killed.

There wasn’t anything for me to do.

“Easy as pie. That was amazing, Yoo Yeonha-ssi. How did you instantly grab its tail like that?”

Jayden flattered Yoo Yeonha, to which she returned a smile.

Feeling vain at how easy the fight was, I stepped towards them.

At that moment...

Thwick. I tripped on a rock. I fell forward silently and instinctively grabbed onto what was in front of me. Most likely, it was Yoo Yeonha’s head.

“Kyak—”

A high-pitched scream rang out.

At the same time, a sharp and unnatural object brushed past my hand and Yoo Yeonha’s hair.

Thud.

Yoo Yeonha fell.

“W-What? Is it an ambush!?”

Jayden made a fuss as he pointed his weapon in all directions. Soon, his eyes landed on me. I was kneeled with my hand ramming Yoo Yeonha's head to the ground.

“...”

“...”

Jayden and the rest of the cadets stared blankly at a loss for words. An ominous and dreary silence descended.

“...Let go.”

Yoo Yeonha's said coldly. I could feel my heart contracting. I immediately took my hands off and pretended like nothing happened.

“You...”

Yoo Yeonha staggered up and gave me a deathly glare without caring for her messed up hair.

“Huh? What's that?”

“What's what?”

At that moment, Hazuki pointed at the wall. Thanks to Hazuki's insensitive interruption, I could finally catch a breath of air.

But when I looked at the direction Hazuki was pointing at, I saw an arrow stuck in the cave's wall.

Then, I finally understood the situation.

The sound of something cutting through the air and that strange brushing sensation... It wasn't hard to figure out what just occurred.

“...”

Yoo Yeonha's head turned with a creak to the arrow. I was genuinely terrified. When she discovered the arrow on the wall, her eyes widened.

Though it wasn't what I intended at all, I immediately let out a dry cough and bluffed.

“There’s no need to say thanks, Yoo Yeonha-ssi. We’re teammates after all.”

“Wow. How did you know? I didn’t feel it at all!”

Hazuki asked in genuine awe.

“...Sharpshooters have good perception.”

Perception or whatever, the real reason had to be my high luck. All eight of us had perception that far surpassed that of normal humans. If the others couldn’t detect anything, I most certainly couldn’t have either.

That arrow was likely a trap that used magic power. I mean, just look at the power of that thing, it completely dug itself into the wall! It was too strong to be a trap for training.

“That was close. Are you unhurt, Yoo Yeonha-ssi?”

I approached the arrow while making idle remarks.

“Huu...”

I could hear the sound of Yoo Yeonha’s breath from behind me. Was she forgiving me? Or was she still angry about what happened?

In any case, I squatted down in front of the arrow and turned on my laptop.

===

[Poison Arrow]

「Killing Power – 4/10」

「Additional Effect – Silent Ambush」

—An arrow tipped with nerve poison.

===

It was as I expected.

“I’ll take this.”

I put the arrow in my bag along with my laptop

“...Let’s go.”

Yoo Yeonha spoke. I flinched for a moment before turning around. Yoo Yeonha had tidied herself up and was now staring at me while biting her lips.

Jayden asked as he glanced at Yoo Yeonha’s face to see her expression.

“Yeonha-ssi, are you okay?”

“Don’t chitchat.”

“Yes, got it.”

After that, we walked without much talking.

After walking past the Salamander corpse, the scenery began to change. The dark surroundings began to light up, and plants and trees began to appear. Surprisingly, the trees were red like maple trees.

Furthermore, a wind began to blow. But it was far from a cool refreshing wind. Rather, it was a hot wind that made it hard to breathe.

“...So hot.”

Jayden murmured as he took off his outer clothes. Jin Hoseung, Kim Jingyu, Lee Shaung, Hazuki, and I also took off a layer of clothes. Only Yoo Yeonha remained fully clothed. Even as she sweated in buckets, she protected her dignity.

“Haa... It must be a Field type.”

Dungeons were generally separated into two types – Stage and Field.

Like its name suggested, Stage Dungeons had multiple layers that had to be cleared in order, while Field Dungeons just had monsters that had to be killed until the boss monster appeared.

“Did the advance team hunt everything? There’s nothing here.”

After walking for about 20 minutes, Jayden yawned, seemingly bored.

“No, each team had different entrances. If we started from the east, the other team should have started from the west. Also, I can see a group of monsters up ahead.”

“Oh?”

On the tiny craters up ahead, there were four Salamanders and 11 Peanut Flames.

“15 in total, Salamanders and Peanut Flames. Looks like it’ll be tough.”

“That many?”

Hazuki’s eye widened.

“Yep.”

I held up my gun, at which Jayden gave a condescending sneer.

“Pft, what can you do with a gun? You won’t even be able to kill a Peanut Flame... retard.”

Jayden whispered the last bit so that Yoo Yeonha couldn’t hear it.

I had to admit, with this training handgun, I couldn’t pierce through the Salamander’s skin. Peanut Flames were also monsters capable of wielding magic power, and the flame barriers they constantly covered themselves with gave them a tough exterior. But I wasn’t completely out of options. If I hit three bullets in the same spot, I should be able to break through the flame barrier.

“You’ll see.”

“Hmph.”

Jayden twisted his lips as he released his sword qi.

“If you’re so confident, do you want to make a bet?”

“...”

But I still wasn’t strong enough to beat Jayden. Just when I was about to refuse...

Whish!

A whip flew in like lightning, striking the ground between Jayden and me.

“Whoa!”

“...!”

Jayden and I both turned towards Yoo Yeonha.
But she only spoke two words with a dead-cold face.

“Please. Focus.”



Same time. Chae Nayun’s team had already suffered various difficulties. The main cause was Sven, whose body had been paralyzed by a trap.

“God, where did that arrow even come from?”

At Chae Nayun’s grumbling, Sven murmured quietly.

“You can leave me behi—”

“Leave you behind? If you know you’re a bother, just stay put.”

Even without Sven, Chae Nayun had led her teammates this far. If she could clear the Dungeon, she would receive an overwhelming score with her individual result and the teamwork she showed. Chae Nayun couldn’t give up the only chance to win against Kim Suho.

“What should we do?”

Demian, her teammate, asked.

“Wait here for now. I think the Dungeon’s boss is up ahead. Can you see it?”

Chae Nayun looked far into the distance.

A giant golem with a body made of lava. The lava spilling from its body clearly marked its territory.

“...Yeah, it has to be the boss.”

It was a Magma Golem, a monster that was at least intermediate rank grade 5. Chae Nayun and her team somehow managed to make it here, but they knew they couldn't defeat the Magma Golem even if Sven was fine.

"We won't be able to beat it with just us. Another team should be arriving here soon. Let's join forces."

"...But what if no one chose the same pathway as us?"

"That shouldn't be possible. At least three teams should come here by design."

Other cadets might have thought the choice was random, but Chae Nayun knew something they didn't. A pathway would disappear once three teams entered it.

"Remember, we're graded on our individual performance, not who finishes first."

Sven couldn't hear Chae Nayun's heated voice.

Huu. Huu.

To him, his entire surroundings were dead silent. He felt as though he was in a vacuum. In this comfort, he slowly collected his breath. The guilt he felt towards his teammates, his self-loathing and inferiority complex all seemed to disappear, as tranquility descended in his mind.

—Child, don't you want to get stronger?

At that moment, a bewitching voice invaded his heart, causing a ripple in the serene surface. Sven opened his eyes slightly. Two brilliant spheres of light lit up the dark sky. As though they were eyes, the spheres of light curved to an arc before pouring into Sven's pupils.

—Wasn't it painful? I can give you power.

The voice became clearer and pounded Sven's heart. Feeling the wave of emotions surging from the deepest depths of his heart, Sven teared up.

I want to get stronger. I want to get stronger. I want to meet the expectations of my

country's people, who hails me as their greatest hope, and the expectations of my parents, who believes I will become the world's greatest Hero. I don't want to suffer from this endless sense of hopelessness and defeat. I don't want to hate myself anymore...

—You only have to pay a cheap price. It's far lighter than giving up everything.

Sven nodded his head at the warm voice.

And he slowly reached out towards the gentle light caressing him.

Chapter 26

Mock Dungeon Trial (3)

“I’m sure everyone knows what kind of a monster Peanut Flames are.”

Peanut Flames were low-rank grade 2 element type monsters. They were named Peanut Flames because they look like tiny will-o-wisps, but on closer inspection, one could see that they were lizards. They were generally the size of an adult man’s forearm and looked like wisps of flame because they encased themselves in an oval barrier.

“We’ll have to kill the Peanut Flames first.”

The Peanut Flames’ only method of attack was shooting out fireballs, but because they had tough barriers and traveled in groups, they weren’t easy to deal with without ample combat experience.

“But who’s going to draw the Salamanders’ attention in the meanwhile?”

“I can do it.”

Hazuki raised her hand at Jayden’s words.

“I’m pretty quick on my feet. I got 5th place in speed.”

“Perfect.”

Jayden used English for the first time since we met. Yoo Yeonha spoke with a soft smile.

“Peanut Flames are a lot slower than Salamanders, so you only have to draw their attention.”

“Yes, then I’ll leave you to cover me.”

Hazuki stretched before shouting “I’m going—!” and rushing forward. After

approaching the cluster of monsters in the blink of an eye, she hurled her axe and let out a spirited shout. The angered Salamanders then began to waddle towards Hazuki. Using this opportunity, Jayden rushed into the enemy line.

“Huap!”

The sword he swung with a rugged breath clashed with a Peanut Flame’s barrier. A flash of light erupted from the collision of flame and magic power. Jayden’s single attack drew a clear crack on the Peanut Flame’s barrier, and a magic power arrow flew in, striking the crack. Jayden and Kim Jingyu’s joint attack easily shattered the Peanut Flame’s barrier, and Jayden cut down the exposed lizard without hesitation.

It was a perfect display of teamwork, but there were still many enemies left.

Jayden turned to a different direction. In that instant, a terrifying whip shot past his shoulder, grabbing three Peanut Flames together and marking them to be Jayden’s next prey. Jayden immediately charged towards the restrained Peanut Flames.

I also made my move. I didn’t need to run around like the others, being simple yet elegant. After finding a Peanut Flame, I pulled the trigger four times. Four bullets shot towards the Peanut Flame in a line.

The first magic bullet struck the Peanut Flame’s barrier and exploded.

The barrier still stood strong, but immediately afterwards, the second magic bullet struck the same spot as the first magic bullet. The barrier shook but still remained standing.

Next was the third magic bullet. Just like the second magic bullet, it struck the same spot, and barrier finally broke down.

With its barrier gone, the lizard inside was shot to death by the fourth bullet.

“...What?”

Next to me, a dazed interjection rang out. It was Kim Jingyu, who was also a sharpshooter.

Admittedly, what I did must have looked shocking for him.

Unlike the difficult labor that was weaving an arrow with magic power and pulling the bowstring with one’s strength, all I had to do to kill a Peanut Flame was pull the gun’s trigger four times.

“Guns are lacking in destructive power, but in exchange, they have less recoil and delay between shots.”

I boasted as I waved my gun around, but in truth, this was only possible against slow low-rank monsters like Peanut Flames. It was also likely that luck played a part in the attack.

“...”

“Focus, focus.”

Seeing Kim Jingyu’s dumbstruck face, I pointed at the other Peanut Flames. Coincidentally, Yoo Yeonha was striking her whip down at them. Her whip became grotesquely longer and swept through the ground. From her whip, I could sense a tiny spark of electricity. That was Yoo Yeonha’s Gift. It seemed she was already on the edge of achieving enlightenment.

Being impressed or congratulating her could come later. For now, I looked for my next target, another Peanut Flame.

But now that the battle was fully underway, the Peanut Flames were more excited. As a result, killing them wasn’t as easy as before. Of course, that didn’t mean it was difficult. Although I couldn’t break through its barrier even after six bullets, the seventh bullet luckily pierced through its magic core, killing it in one shot.

In any case, by the time I killed three Peanut Flames, the battle was nearing its end. Once all the Peanut Flames were dead, we jointly attacked the four Salamanders Hazuki was holding back, and there was nothing they could do to fight back.

It was easy to see why Salamanders were only low-intermediate rank. No matter how powerful their firebreaths were, they couldn’t use it once their tails were tied up.

“Whew, it’s over. I managed to kill six thanks to Yeonha-ssi.”

“...That’s good to hear. Let’s count them.”

We approached the mana puppets and counted the bodies.

One, two, three... fifteen.

We had killed them all.

“Do we keep going now?”

At the same time that Jayden spoke with a smile, a light flashed from afar. I instinctively turned towards the light. In that instant, my mind became blank. A Salamander was breathing out a beam of fire. A firebreath the size of a pillar hurled towards us while melting the surface of the ground. I could feel my brain yelling. This was a direct strike. There was no way to dodge it. And if it hit, I would die. I had to block it if I wanted to live. But how? I immediately thought of Stigma's magic power. If I could form a barrier of water like the Peanut Flames did with fire, I might be able to block it.

...The Stigma on my arm rose up with a blue glow, as pain spread out from my upper arm. Following my will, the magic power was released into the air.

Immediately afterwards, a wave of fire swept through us.

Tzzzzzzz—

A terrifying amount of steam erupted from the collision of water and fire. The hot steam clouded the surroundings like a fog, blocking our vision. The barrier I created was destroyed from hitting the firebreath.

Then, a momentary silence descended before being broken by a deep voice that reflected everyone's thoughts.

"...T-That was no joke."

It was Jayden. A thick terror could be seen on his face. He seemed to be on the verge of having a panic attack.

"That last attack, weren't we dead if it hit us?"

'Yeah, we would've been fried up really good.' Thinking that in my head, I collapsed on the ground. I couldn't put any strength in my legs. My entire body felt numb. I thanked the dense cloud of steam for concealing my pathetic state.

"Oy, sharpshooter. The Salamander's still alive, but we can't see anything. Tell me where that bastard is before my heart explodes."

Jayden spoke. His voice was trembling with fear. I also tried to calm myself. 'Calm down, Kim Hajin. It can't see us either. We just have to kill it before the steam

disappears.'

"Look at the trajectory."

I held up my gun.

Rather than describing its location with words, it was better to just show it.

"I'm shooting."

I pulled the trigger. The bullet shot towards the Salamander, drawing a blue trace. Although the bullet reached the Salamander in under a second, the trail it left behind stayed for a longer time. The others immediately threw everything they had at the direction of the trail.

The Salamander died without a yelp, almost as though it spent its entire energy in its previous attack.

At the same time, I could hear an unpleasant sound of metal cutting through skin.

"...Wait, is this blood?"

Jayden murmured in a daze. Just like he said, viscous fresh blood streamed down from the cut on the Salamander's body.

"A mana puppet with blood? That's impossible."

"Then what the fuck is this? It's sticky as hell. And what was that last attack? That was a real firebreath. I didn't even touch it and my skin's a little burned."

Mana puppets' attacks were lowered by two ranks compared to the monster they were based off of. In other words, the attack of a low-intermediate rank mana puppet was not even at the level of a low rank monster. Mana puppets used in combat training thus sent data of attacks it received back to Cube's scientists, who would simulate the attack on the real version of the monster and give back the result.

"Calm down."

"You think I can just calm... Yes, you're right."

Jayden, who was about to erupt with anger, calmed down when faced with Yoo Yeonha.

“They didn’t tell us that something like this wouldn’t happen. It was a Salamander. It’s entirely possible that a normal salamander naturally evolved into a monster. After all, we’re in a Dungeon, even if it’s artificial.”

“..”

At Yoo Yeonha’s calm input, Jayden remained silent. He collected his breath and calmed himself down. Yoo Yeonha was always like this, but Jayden was also fairly composed for a high schooler.

Meanwhile, the steam covering up the surroundings began to dissipate. Everyone was wet from the steam and water.

“Are you okay?”

Yoo Yeonha asked me, likely because I was directly in line of the firebreath. My luck was 9.1, so why did it fly towards me of all people? Was the world trying to tell me to take more SP? Or was it because I was the only one capable of blocking it? Now that I think about it, Yoo Yeonha dying would have been the greatest calamity.

“I’m fine.”

I was fine, for now.

“...Oh right. What the fuck was that?”

However, Jayden approached me, making a fuss.

“What?”

“I said in the beginning that anyone with the water attribute should come out.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Oh, please. How did you block that firebreath then? That fucking steam was created because it clashed with water, didn’t it!?”

“Sharpshooters normally carry a shield or two to protect themselves.”

“...What?”

Stigma's magic power had followed my will and created a water attribute barrier. This shield blocked the Salamander's attack, and I now didn't have any magic power remaining.

...But this wasn't something I could just tell others.

"This son of a bitch..."

"Quiet. Let's get out of here for now. What happened just now... I'm sure we'll be compensated with additional points."

Yoo Yeonha spoke as she stared at the Salamander's corpse.



While walking forward, Yoo Yeonha stole a glance behind her.

A stupid-looking man was pulling his hair up. Sweat dripped from his hair. It would have looked cool if he was Shin Jonghak, but it was a bit dirty when that man did it.

In any case, Yoo Yeonha couldn't hide the strange feeling she got.

What blocked the Salamander's firebreath was undoubtedly a water attribute magic power. But a cadet who wasn't Shin Jonghak or Kim Suho was capable of imbuing his magic power with an attribute?

Yoo Yeonha couldn't help but recall Chae Nayun's words. That Kim Hajin was hiding his true strength.

Kim Hajin explained what happened by saying that he had a magic armament.

There were indeed armaments like that. They were one of many types of defensive equipment that sharpshooters used.

Aptly called Cloth Armor, these equipment looked exactly like ordinary clothes but had an additional functionality of releasing magic power to protect their wearer in danger.

For a moment, Yoo Yeonha wondered if Jin Sechan gave him a Cloth Armor without telling her. But of course, that was impossible.

While Salamanders were only low-intermediate ranked, items that could block their firebreath cost at least 40 million won. It wasn't an amount Jin Sechan could be responsible for. Not to mention, he had no reason to do so either.

In that case, there were only two answers left.

Either what Chae Nayun said was true, or Kim Hajin, being scared for his life, had really prepared a Cloth Armor beforehand.

Yoo Yeonha found the former to be more likely. In that case, how Kim Hajin knew the Mountain Tyrant's vital point also made sense.

The question was why he was hiding his power.

That was what she couldn't understand.

Just why...

"We're here."

At that moment, Kim Hajin spoke up. Yoo Yeonha flinched from a guilty conscious.

"W-What's here? There's nothing here."

"We're almost there. The dungeon's boss is up ahead along with another team."

"Oh, really?"

"Yeah, let's hurry. It looks like they're in trouble."

Kim Hajin took the lead and quickened his pace.

Yoo Yeonha followed suit, still harboring suspicion.

Chapter 27

Mock Dungeon Trial (4)

[15:29:07]

Chae Nayun's team remained dead silent. They didn't have any other choice but to quietly wait for another team to show up. She wanted to be far away from the boss so she could at least breathe with ease, but she had to stay close enough to see the another team coming.

At that moment...

“Kuaaaak!”

The silence was broken by a sudden scream. For some reason, Sven was having a seizure. Chae Nayun and her team members all turned towards Sven in shock before quickly turning towards the Magma Golem in terror. Just as they feared, the Magma Golem was staring at them. The faces of the seven team members turned pale.

—Guooooo!

With a roar resembling an earthquake, the Magma Golem slammed down its fist on the ground. Lava flowed into the ground from its body. Chae Nayun picked up Sven and shouted loudly.

“Dodge!”

Immediately afterwards, lava erupted from the ground they were standing on. It was one of Magma Golem's attacks, a terrifying ambush attack that sent lava underground and making it erupt into a pillar of fire.

Though the cadets spread out before it was too late, the Magma Golem was only getting started.

From its face, what had to be a “mouth” opened wide. From inside, a current of lava poured out like a torrent. The Magma Golem rode the lava current it spat out, charging towards Chae Nayun's team.

—Guooooo!

The terrifying sight of a giant golem sliding down a current of lava caused Chae Nayun's team to run away in fear.

The Magma Golem's first target was Chae Nayun, who was slowed down by having to carry Sven.

After arriving in front of her in an instant, it brandished its arms, slamming down and swinging sideways.

Chae Nayun concentrated entirely on dodging the Magma Golem's attacks. Meanwhile, Sven began to murmur strange words on her back. Because he spoke in German, Chae Nayun couldn't understand a thing he said.

"Hey! Stop screwing around and wake up!"

Immediately after her shout, a pillar of fire shot up from the place Chae Nayun was standing on. Chae Nayun quickly jumped back, but that wasn't the only a pillar of fire. Lava was erupting all around her.

Chae Nayun found herself trapped by several pillars of fire. In front of her, the Magma Golem raised its arms up high.

At that moment, Chae Nayun sensed her death.

'This golem will kill me. This terrifying being in front of me can't possibly be just a puppet...' Petrified, she couldn't think about anything else. Without closing her eyes, she stared at the two fists crashing down on her.

Tang!

Just when the horrifying torrent of lava was about to devour her, the Magma Golem's head bent forward. With its arms raised, the Magma Golem stopped moving. Its expression showed that it was enraged, but its body remained frozen as though the sudden attack petrified its entire body.

Chae Nayun turned towards the direction of the mysterious attack.

There, she saw a man carrying a handgun.



[15:30:30]

“What’s this?”

We stood in front of a giant wall.

A wall made of volcanic rocks that were at least 10 meters tall. This wall, which was blocking the path to the boss area, wasn’t here just a moment ago. But figuring out who put it here wasn’t the biggest problem.

“Hey, sharpshooter, didn’t you say the boss was up ahead? It’s a dead end.”

“It should be past this wall. Break it.”

“...Acting like the leader, huh.”

Even as he complained, Jayden took out his sword. A blade covered in magic power drew a diagonal line.

Pang!

However, not even a scratch appeared on the wall. Only Jayden’s hand trembled.

“Aaak! Yeah, genius idea!”

It must have hurt quite a bit, as Jayden ran around in pain. Standing still, I fell in thought. If Jayden’s sword qi couldn’t break the wall, it had to be made of magic power. In that case, Yoo Yeonha wouldn’t be able to break through it either.

“Is this really the right path? There was a fork in the road on our way here.”

Yoo Yeonha asked in doubt as she touched the wall here and there.

“This is the right place.”

No matter what anyone said, I could clearly see Chae Nayun and her team fighting the Magma Golem beyond the wall.

I closely inspected the wall blocking our path. Raising my head, I looked up. I could

see a stream of light faintly shining from the top.

“...Up there.”

“What?”

The team members also looked up.

“There’s a gap.”

Was it for ventilation? Or was it carelessness by whoever created this wall? In any case, it was most certainly a mistake.

“How are we going to climb up there?” Jayden asked.

“You can’t?” I retorted, genuinely curious. The average jump height of warrior cadets was 4 meters. Adding magic power on top of that, it shouldn’t be difficult to jump several times that height. Even though the wall was a bit high, it shouldn’t be to the point that they couldn’t climb up.

“What, you think you can do it? What are you going to hold onto when we can’t even make a dent in the wall?”

“...”

Jayden seemed to have given up, but I felt like I could do it. Just like Jayden said, we couldn’t make dents on the wall. However, the surface of volcanic rocks was rugged by nature. With my Art, I should be able to climb up.

‘I didn’t think Parkour would come into use so quickly...’

“I’m going ahead, so you guys can do whatever you want.”

“Stop joking. Let’s go back and try the other pathway.”

With that, Yoo Yeonha turned back. However, I lightly jumped up. Grabbing onto a jagged part of the wall’s surface, I put my legs up. Then, I reached up with my hand. My hands and feet stuck to the wall like magnets.

Just like that, I climbed the wall and reached the top in the blink of an eye. Then, I looked down. For a moment, I felt lightheaded. It was higher than I imagined.

“Is that guy a cat?”

Jayden murmured in disbelief. I also enjoyed seeing my team members’ surprised expressions.

But I didn’t have the time to leisurely admire the view.

Guooooo—

A deep ringing sound capable of instilling terror rang out beyond the wall.

“W-What! What was that!?”

“You guys come up too. I’m going first!”

I squeezed myself through the gap and used Parkour to climb down.

After landing, I finally caught a glimpse of Chae Nayun and her team being chased by a Magma Golem.

Just by looking at it, one could see that it wasn’t a puppet. The entire Field was melting with its every movement, so how could it be a puppet?

I quickly ran towards them and opened the extradimensional space in my Stigma. The tattoo on my upper arm glowed, and a corporeal magic power gathered in my hand. In an instant, it condensed into a gun and several bullets.

I loaded a bullet I had prepared beforehand. It was a water attribute magic bullet, one I had made for emergency use. Though it was an expensive investment costing 30 SP, with the strong luck that went into making it, it would undoubtedly show great destructive power.

“Whew.”

After running in range to shoot, I stopped. I panted from being out of breath, but I didn’t have time to rest. Chae Nayun was surrounded by the Magma Golem. I immediately aimed at the back of Magma Golem’s head and fired.

Tang!

The bullet struck the Magma Golem's head squarely, and the Magma Golem's head bent forward. Immediately afterwards, the water attribute bullet reacted to its lava body and petrified its upper body. It was the so-called paralysis state.

I looked past the Magma Golem.

Sven was on Chae Nayun's back. Chae Nayun seemed to be in a momentary shock, while Sven looked like he had already fallen to a Djinn.

I shouted at Chae Nayun.

"Hey! Snap out of it!"

"...Huh?"

Thankfully, Chae Nayun responded quickly.

"First, put that guy on your back on the ground."

"What, where are the others? Why are you the only one..."

"Put him down!"

Chae Nayun put Sven down like I said.

"Happy?"

"...Yeah."

I ran in since the situation looked grim, but now I broke out in a cold sweat. At the same time, the Magma Golem's body trembled. It seemed it wanted to eject the bullet from its body. In other words, it would move again soon.

I signaled Chae Nayun.

"Hurry up and..."

Save me.

"Battle position!"

Before I could finish my sentence, Chae Nayun shouted. Immediately afterwards, a spear flew in and pierced the Magma Golem's neck. Her teammates followed suit. I quickly turned around and ran behind Chae Nayun's team.

"Buy time for me!"

Chae Nayun shouted as she pulled on her arrowless bowstring. Soon, her magic power condensed on her bow. She seemed to be making special magic power arrow. It was likely what she learned from her previous defeat to the museum's Djinn. As expected, Chae Nayun wasn't lazy when it came to self-reflection and training.

"..."

I dropped my jaws in awe at the sight happening in front of me.

Chae Nayun's magic power created a fierce current, which rushed towards the bow and formed an arrow. In truth, it was too big to be called an arrow. It was a pillar. An attack of this level was impossible without exceptional mental power and application of magic power.

But before her arrow could finish forming, the Magma Golem freed itself from paralysis.

Guooooo—!

Her teammates tried to hold out as long as they could, but they were sent flying by a single swing of its arm. Roaring, the Magma Golem charged towards Chae Nayun.

I quickly held up my gun.

But before the Magma Golem's fist could reach Chae Nayun and before I could fire my gun, a single sword strike blocked the Magma Golem's advance.

The sword strike... came from Sven.

After blocking the Magma Golem with his sword, Sven turned around and muttered.

"Sorry, I was late to recover."

Chae Nayun let go of her bowstring without an answer. Sven jumped to the side. With a brilliant light, Chae Nayun's giant arrow pierced through the Magma Golem's heart.

“Haa... Haa...”

As soon as she shot her arrow, Chae Nayun collapsed on the ground. She knew she would need at least 15 seconds until she could move.

—Guooo...

Even after taking such an enormous magic power attack, the Magma Golem didn't die. Chae Nayun softly bit her lips.

“I'll take care of the rest.”

But before the Magma Golem could recover and attack, Sven sliced off its head. With that, the Magma Golem's body turned into hard volcanic rock before disappearing. Silence descended in the battlefield.

Sven put away his sword, walked up to me, and gave a slight nod.

“Thank you for helping us.”

“...”

I stared at Sven.

He had undoubtedly formed a contract with a Djinn. But unlike in the original story, he didn't lose control. I was thankful for now. I had no more energy left to fight a Djinn. But Sven was destined to go berserk. While being eaten by the devil, he would tread farther into the path of destruction.

That was because the devil Sven was contracted to was far too strong for him to handle...

“Sure took your sweet time, bastard.”

Chae Nayun muttered while bent down on the ground. She seemed to have a lot to say, but she must have been out of strength as she closed her mouth.

Chapter 28

The Djinn and Gari Mountain (1)

Lying on the ground, I stared up at the ceiling. Scorching heat dug into my clothes. The dungeon's boss had been killed, but the heat remained.

Bored, I tilted my head to the side. Chae Nayun's team was talking some distance away. They offered me to join them but I refused. I was too tired to answer the questions they'd inevitably ask.

"Huum."

At that moment, Chae Nayun, who was stealing glances my way for a while, took a deep breath and got up. Then, she walked over.

"..."

She cast a shadow over me and looked down at my face.

"What."

I curled up with only my upper body. Seeing sweat dripping down, Chae Nayun frowned slightly. But after straightening her expression, she sat down next to me. Of course, she was still about ten feet away.

"...I thought I should I say this."

I wasn't sure if she was embarrassed or ashamed, but Chae Nayun spoke with great difficulty while looking up at the ceiling.

"T-Thanks."

"..."

I was genuinely at a loss for words. I stared at Chae Nayun in a daze. That word was

one I thought I'd never hear from her.

Chae Nayun.

Age 17 to 27 in the story.

She was only 16 by American age.^[1] Despite how young she was, the life she lived was far from normal. It was one filled with tragedies.

The first tragedy should have occurred on her sixth birthday. On what should have been the happiest day for a six year old child, her mother was killed by a Djinn. After that incident, her personality developed in a completely different direction. The child, whose dream was to “become like her Mommy”, cried tears of blood and sought to become a Hero. While other children her age laughed and played around, she trained in hitting and breaking targets.

The scar from that day was etched in the deepest part of her heart. As a fourth generation chaebol, even having a ‘true friend’ to mend this wound was a disgrace. Revealing one’s deepest thoughts was akin to revealing one’s weakness, and the hyenas infesting the outside world would jump at their chance to take advantage.

As such, the only person she could trust and rely on was her blood relative who also shared the same pain, Chae Jinyoon. Because her father had been too busy as the successor of a chaebol family, she rarely saw her father.

But this cruel world had even taken Chae Jinyoon away from her.

The emotions she must have felt... I had no way of knowing because I didn’t write them.

But if I were to make a guess, Chae Nayun most likely honed her conviction to be even sharper. Only believing in herself and taking the pursuit of strength as her way of life, she must have ignored the worsening wound on her heart. Telling herself that she will overcome everything on her own and not opening her heart to anyone else, she must have put herself through arduous and painful physical training...

Because of this, there weren’t many people who had received her thanks. I knew this better than anyone, even Chae Nayun herself, because I was the one who purposely wrote “sorry” rather than “thank you.”

But just now, she had said “thanks”.

That was the greatest praise she could have given.

But at the same time, the goal I had to accomplish tightened my heart.

I had to kill the person she loved and respected the most. I had to make her experience the feeling of losing her family once again.

“By the way...”

Chae Nayun’s voice cut off my thought. She was smacking her lips as though she had something more to say, but no words left her mouth.

“What.”

I urged her in frustration.

Chae Nayun added just one sentence with her eyes still on the ceiling.

“...Why aren’t you fighting back?”

“Hm? What do you... Oh.”

She was talking about Shin Jonghak’s lackeys.

Even though she was the one who instigated it, it seemed she felt sympathetic since I didn’t fight back.

I gave a simple reply.

“Because I can’t win even if I fight back.”

Chae Nayun furrowed her brows in an instant and finally looked back down at me. She truly had a baby-face. Unlike Yoo Yeonha, who looked adult-like, Chae Nayun’s cheeks still had a bit of baby fat. Was it because the Magma Golem beat her up? She looked like a bun. I laughed inwardly.

“What are you talking about, I saw the power of your gun with my own eyes.”

“Oh, that?”

I took out the Desert Eagle from my bag. To put it back in my extradimensional space, Stigma had to recover its magic power.

“Personal weapon. Does that explain it?”

Looking at my high rank weapon, Chae Nayun's eyes widened in shock.

"You know you're going to get expelled if you're found out, right?"

"That's why I'm using it only when I need to."

Chae Nayun closed her mouth. Then, she rubbed her chin as though she was pondering about something. I had no way of knowing what this girl was thinking about. But I waited since it looked like she was looking for an answer.

After about 3 minutes, Chae Nayun finally voiced her thoughts.

"Things still don't add up completely... Ah, wait, your Gift! You have a Gift that strengthens guns!"

I held myself back from bursting into laughter. For the record, Gift and enlightenment were two different things. Even before one became enlightened, a Gift could be observed and developed through experience and hard-work.

"You can think what you want."

I hit her off with a shrug. It was a misunderstanding I didn't need to correct.

Chae Nayun seemed to have concluded her guess as the truth, as she nodded with a proud face.

"Huhu, I knew it. Oh, I'll let you off the hook for using your personal weapon. Just don't use it again."

Chae Nayun got up and dusted her butt.

Before walking away, she stopped and turned her head towards me.

"...By the way."

"What."

With her back still pointing my way, she asked in a much lower voice than before.

"...Don't you have anything to say to me?"

"..."

The question she asked indifferently made me flinch.

This might be her offer of reconciliation, that she would forgive me for my insensitive remarks about her older brother. If I was right, from what I knew about Chae Nayun's personality, she was making a huge concession.

"...I don't."

However, I rejected her offer clearly and also got up.

My current relationship with Chae Nayun was at the perfect distance. Cold, yet not freezing. I called it the "uncomfortable neighbor" relationship. Anything more would be too much of a burden on me.

"...I see."

With that, Chae Nayun left.

As I watched her leave, my eyes met Sven's. He didn't dodge my eyes. He tilted his head while looking at me with emotionless eyes. This sequence of action put a chill down my back.

—Emergency alert. All cadets are to leave the Dungeon immediately. Once again, all cadets are to leave the Dungeon immediately.

A sound rang out from the ceiling. The mock Dungeon trial had come to an end. I turned back to return the way I came from.

"Huh?"

But at that moment, I discovered a familiar person.

It was Yoo Yeonha.

Though others might only see a faint silhouette, I could clearly see Yoo Yeonha in the distance. It seemed she really climbed the wall, as she was covered in dust.

But as everyone just heard, the mock Dungeon trial was over. In other words, she had gone through all that trouble for nothing.

"Argh..."

With her eyes closed, Yoo Yeonha shook at the injustice.



It seemed the mock Dungeon trial ran into several problems.

The first problem was that many of the internal cameras had stopped working.

The second was that was a systematic error. A problem had occurred with the distribution of people in charge of monitoring the situation, and as a result, the instructors had discovered the broken cameras too late.

The third and final problem was that real monsters had trespassed into the Dungeon instead of mana puppets. This was the biggest problem.

The mock Dungeon trial was canceled as a result, and everyone's grades were postponed as well.

"Wow, really? A natural born Magma Golem?"

"Yeah, I heard it was intermediate ranked."

"No way... So what happened? Who killed it?"

"It was Chae Nayun and Sven..."

The cadets gathered outside the Dungeon chattered loudly, while the instructors checked people off to make sure there were no casualties.

"Ehew."

'...Then what was all the trouble I went through for?'

Yoo Yeonha let out a deep sigh. She staggered from the rising sense of emptiness and lethargy. Then, she discovered Chae Nayun who was walking around the Dungeon's entrance. Yoo Yeonha had many questions she wanted Chae Nayun to answer.

"Nayun."

"Hm? Oh, Yeonha. What's up?"

"Are you okay? I heard the Magma Golem..."

After bringing up a topic she wasn't interested in, Yoo Yeonha brought up Kim Hajin when Chae Nayun seemed to be bored.

“Oh right, you know Kim Hajin, right? The guy you brought up during our last—”

“Mm? Ah~ Kim Hajin?”

“...Eh?”

Chae Nayun’s reaction was completely different than before. Previously, she growled when Kim Hajin’s name was brought up, but now she looked completely fine talking about him.

“Uh... Yeah, Kim Hajin.”

“What about him?”

“Well... Remember what you said before? That he—”

Chae Nayun lightly cut her off.

“Oh, that? It was a misunderstanding.”

“...Yes?”

Yoo Yeonha was so dumbfounded that she blurted out in polite speech.

It was only a few days ago that you were coughing up blood while talking about him, and now you’re saying it was a misunderstanding? I don’t think it’s a misunderstanding now!

“It was a misunderstanding, really. Well, I wouldn’t say he’s someone I want to be friends with, but he’s not such a bad guy.”

‘Yep, that’s right.’ Chae Nayun nodded as though she was satisfied with her own judgment.

Yoo Yeonha stared at Chae Nayun in a daze. She was so dumbfounded that she wanted to strangle her.

“Oh, hey! Kim Suho!”

Suddenly, Chae Nayun shouted loudly. Yoo Yeonha felt like her eardrums would burst.

“I’ll talk to you later, Yeonha!”

Chae Nayun ran past Yoo Yeonha and disappeared. She was quick, like a puppy chasing after her master. Yoo Yeonha turned around to see just who she was waiting for. It was Kim Suho. Chae Nayun ran up to Kim Suho, who had just left the Dungeon, slapped his back, and stood in front of him as if to block his path.

“Whoa, that’s surprised me.”

“Did anything happen to your team?”

“...It was no joke. I almost died from exhaustion.”

For the record, Kim Suho chose the 8th pathway.

“I can see that on your face. You look like a grandpa.”

“...Really?”

Yoo Yeonha watched their affectionate interaction with interest. She was happy seeing them hit off well together. Thinking about it now, Kim Suho did seem to resemble Chae Nayun’s older brother.

“Oh, Chae Nayun, here you are.”

At that moment, Shin Jonghak cut in between them as if to break them apart.

“Huu.”

Yoo Yeonha sighed. Since Shin Jonghak was there, Yoo Yeonha began to walk towards them. At that moment, she discovered a man staring at Chae Nayun from a distance.

“...What’s up with him?”

The man was Kim Hajin. But the way he was watching Chae Nayun seemed... strange. His eyes seemed to carry a heavy worry and a deep sadness. Yoo Yeonha stared at his

disgusting eyes for a moment.

It didn't take long for her to come to a conclusion.

“What, he likes Chae Nayun too? The heck... What's so good about a tomboy like her...?”

Yoo Yeonha trembled from the frustration rising from deep in her heart.

But even if other men liked Chae Nayun, Shin Jonghak couldn't.

With such thought, she quickly walked over to Kim Suho, Shin Jonghak, and Chae Nayun.

1. In Korea, you are one year old when you are born unlike in America.

Chapter 29

The Djinn and Gari Mountain (2)

11 P.M.

I finally returned to my room 12 hours after the start of the Mock Dungeon Trial. Cube told the cadets that an internal investigation would occur rather than deploying an external police or Heroes of the Hero Association. It was only possible thanks to no cadet being killed or injured.

In other words, the Djinns making up the upper brass of Cube had succeeded in masking this incident. An extensive external investigation would only occur after the end of the 'second incident.'

"...I got super lucky."

In any case, the Fitness Center was closed because of the ruckus, so I was loafing around in my room, looking at my laptop.

[An incredible luck applies, blocking a silent ambush!]

[Narrow Escape from Death (1/9) – A special stat, accumulation of luck, becomes partly unlocked!]

As I thought, it was by pure luck that I dodged the poison arrow. Because of it, a special stat called accumulation of luck was unlocked.

A special stat was... Well, to explain this, I had to first explain how stats worked.

In this world, stats were divided into three major categories: variable stats, invariable stats, and special stats.

Variable stats and invariable stats were something people were born with. Even a baby had strength, magic power, vitality, intelligence, and other basic stats.

But special stats were something that most people didn't have. For example, every human was born with magic power, the power to wield mana. But they weren't born with 'magic power control' and 'mental power', which were needed to conjure and utilize magic power. These two abilities came from an innate talent and continuous

effort.

As a result, cadets generally had a different number of special stats. Most had two basic special stats – magic power control and mental power. In the case of Kim Suho, he also had an additional special stat called ‘resistance’, and Chae Nayun had an additional special stat called ‘intuition’.

“...Hm.”

[Accumulation of luck – 11%]

And I had just gotten one too.

It was only 11% unlocked, so there really wasn’t anything I could do with it. Plus, there was no explanation about the stat, so I didn’t even know what it did.

‘Well, I’m sure I’ll found out eventually.’

The more important matter was Sven. I needed to know what he was planning. He was undoubtedly scheming on Chae Nayun, and he would likely lose control once he was alone with her. After all, one of the negative side-effects of a Djinn Contract was amplification of emotions and obsession.

Should I contact Chae Nayun?... No.

I opened my laptop. It felt like a crime... no, it was most certainly a crime, but I didn’t have any other choice.

Using my laptop’s Internet Access functionality, I accessed Chae Nayun’s smartwatch. I only needed to spend a small amount of SP.

[Chae Nayun → Kim Suho]

[Hey, what’s up?]

[Shin Jonghak → Chae Nayun]

[Hey, do you want to go grab a late night snack?]

Several messages were coming and going, and I tried my best to not look at them. The only conversation I needed to see was Sven’s.

As expected of Chae Nayun, she was receiving messages from several male and female cadets. I only found Sven’s name after scrolling down for a while.

===

Sven: [Thank you for yesterday.]

[Yeah, you did well too. By the way, why do you keep using polite speech? It's uncomfortable.]

Sven: [Is it? I'll talk casually then.]

...

...

Sven: [I hear the hunting club is going to Gangwondo this week. Wanna hunt together?]

[Yeah, sure.]

===

It was a common conversation among colleagues, but Sven's last message caught my attention.

'Hunting club, this week.'

'Hunt together.'

In the original story, this was also the day Sven went berserk.

At that moment...

[Hajin.]

I received a message on my smartwatch. When I saw the sender's name, I couldn't help but grow curious.

It was Kim Suho.

[Do you have time this Thursday?]

"What's up with him?"

Why was Kim Suho contacting me all of the sudden?... Oh, it's that.

For the internal investigation of the previous incident, Cube decided to select the most trustworthy cadets from each grade to search for the culprit. The freshman year representatives were unsurprisingly Shin Jonghak, Kim Suho, and Chae Nayun.

"...But isn't it too early?"

I wasn't sure of the exact date, but I remembered it being around early April. Currently,

it was the end of March. The investigation team had formed quicker than I thought. Plus, I couldn't understand why he would contact me.

[Why?]

[I can't tell you yet. I'll tell you about it when we meet in person. For now, just know that Nayun recommended you.]

“Chae Nayun?”

Why would Chae Nayun recommend me? Because I have good eyes?

I hesitated. The time wasn't a good match. Classes were canceled for Wednesday and Thursday, so I planned on going to Gari Mountain Dungeon on Wednesday and the hunting club was on Thursday.

I replied.

[I'm busy on Thursday, but I'm free on Friday.]

[That's fine, we can meet then.]

Kim Suho replied instantly.

“...Well, it's better for me the closer I am to the storyline.”

After replying “okay”, I went back to looking at my laptop. Next on the list was Sven's social media accounts.



Gangwondo was Korea's biggest mountainous range. The region included Baekdu Mountain, which was known for its rich life energy, and other mountains like the Kumgang mountain, which were rich in spirit energy. As such, martial artists called this area the 'Mecca of Training.'

Because of the rich life energy and spirit energy in Gangwondo's mountains, it attracted all sorts of people including hunters, poachers, Heroes, and mercenaries. Among these were one special occupation known as ginseng digger.

A ginseng digger was someone who searched the mountain grounds for ginseng.

While they weren't strong enough to combat monsters, they traveled the world in search of ginseng with their sense of smell and sight heightened to the limit.

Ginseng could be found in many countries, but the most expensive ginseng were found on the Korean Peninsula. Naturally, ginseng diggers were common in Gangwondo.

Kim Yunjoon was also a ginseng digger.

Gangwondo's ginseng sold for a sky-high price even if they were young, because ginseng increased the amount of mana in one's body. Kim Yunjoon didn't really understand what that meant, but he spent 10 years in Gangwondo's dangerous mountain ranges filled with monsters to dig up money.

The last ginseng he discovered was a year ago. It was a 4-year-old ginseng. In other words, he had no income for a year, but because he received 300 million won from his last ginseng, his family didn't complain much.

Today marked the twentieth time Kim Yunjoon climbed the Gari Mountain.

"...Hm?"

Just like always, he walked with his eyes looking down. When he raised his head to wipe off his sweat, he discovered a young man. The young man wasn't ugly nor handsome. He was simply average. Still, his body seemed to be well-built, most likely because of the well-defined muscles on his arms and legs. It was a common feature among ginseng diggers.

The man repeated walking, stopping, and looking at a map.

"A ginseng digger. But ginsengs aren't found on maps. He must be a newbie."

Kim Yunjoon grinned and walked towards him. The man turned around, having noticed his presence.

Kim Yunjoon asked cheekily.

"Are you also a ginseng digger?"

The man stared back at him in a daze before shaking his head.

"No, I'm just looking for a place."

With that, he hid his map behind him. Kim Yunjoon found his actions quite cute.

“Haha, I understand where you’re coming from, but ginseng aren’t something you can find with maps.”

“...Yes?”

“That map, I don’t know where you got it from, but don’t believe it too much. Only Heaven knows where ginseng are.”

“What?”

The man tilted his head. Kim Yunjoon had a lot he wanted to say to this novice ginseng digger. He felt it was his responsibility as an elite ginseng digger.

Kim Yunjoon then began to talk about his experience as a ginseng digger and showed his cutting-edge equipment. He explained how to dig to avoid damaging the ginseng, then showed pictures of his wife and 13 year old son before laughing and smacking the man’s shoulder.

“When I see young’uns climbing the mountain, I can’t help but think they’re dreaming of striking a fortune. Jumping into the mountains with such a flimsy mindset is no different than throwing away your life. Forgive me for telling you all this, but I hope what I told you will come in handy.”

“Ah... yes.”

The man nodded with a blank face. Kim Yunjoon could feel a deep admiration and respect in the man’s eyes. Just that made his effort worthwhile.

“Then take care. I wish you good luck. In fact, I hope you can grow up to threaten me as a competitor. Don’t forget the advice I gave you today.”

Kim Yunjoon walked past the man. Just in case the man was watching him leave, he raised his hand and waved.



“ ... ”

I stared at a man's back. Then, I looked down at the watch on my wrist. Unknowingly, 30 minutes had passed.

“What is he?”

I ended up wasting time because of some talkative guy. I wanted to cut him off in the middle, but I hesitated, thinking he might be a named herbalist. But I didn't find anything special from the pictures he showed me or his outer appearance. It seemed he was really just a normal ginseng digger.

“I think it's this way...”

I looked at my map once again. The map pointed to the Gari Mountain Dungeon. The map was obtained from the Book of Truth. Just like a genie lamp, all I had to do was ask, “Where is the Gari Mountain Dungeon?”, and it gave me this map.

In fact, this map showed my live location, almost like a GPS system. Looking at my map, I continued towards the Dungeon's location. After about 10 minutes of walking...

“Uk!”

Thud.

I fell down after tripping on something.

“Agh, what is it now?”

I got up after falling pathetically. There was a stem of some sort tangled around my leg. At first, I was frightened out of my mind, thinking it was some plant type monster, but upon closer inspection, I noticed it was just an ordinary stem.

“Whew, that surprised me.”

I pulled on the stem. It didn't seem to go very deep, as I didn't need to put in much strength.

But when I pulled the stem out of the ground, something resembling a bellflower root came out.

“What’s this?”

I threw the root on the ground. After dusting myself off, I took a step to continue walking, but I suddenly remembered what the man I just met told me.

Ginseng.

I looked at the root one more time. Now that I looked at it again, it did resemble a mandrake. I took out my laptop and read the description of the root in front of me.

===

[7-year-old Ginseng]

—A plant that achieved magic power on its own through condensed life energy and spiritual energy. Has strong efficacy no matter how it’s used.

—A treasured item full of nutrients.

===

“ .. ”

I became speechless. There was something I needed to say, but I was too dumbfounded to speak.

So, I just murmured inwardly.

Jackpot.

Chapter 30

The Djinn and Gari Mountain (3)

Ginseng served many purposes.

Consuming it would increase one's stats, and grinding it down and using it as a medicinal ingredient would produce about ten high rank potions. One could even use it for a process called enchantment. In this process, the magic power contained within the ginseng was added to an item, giving it a special effect.

But I didn't have the necessary equipment to make potions nor a connection with a magician to help with enchantment. As such, I could only eat it or sell it.

"Eating it is a bit..."

This ginseng should go for 700 million won. Since I could use Violet Banquet to sell it, I didn't have to worry about being scammed even if I had to pay more in fees. If I sold it now, I could invest the money in stocks and easily get a return of 4~5 billion won. That was enough to buy 7 of the same ginseng.

"...Argh, this is hard."

The unexpected fortune only increased my worry.

For now, I put the ginseng away in my bag.

I could think about this first-world problem after I found the Gari Mountain Dungeon.



Standing in front of a cave, I dusted my hands. Dirt rained down on the ground.

"So this is why it hasn't been discovered until now."

Huu. After taking a deep breath, I glanced behind me. An inch away from my feet was a razor-sharp cliff.

The Gari Mountain Dungeon was located in the middle of a cliff, buried in moss and vines.

I could feel my heart thumping. Even with Parkour, the journey had been too difficult. Without Stigma's magic power as insurance, I would have been too scared of falling to try.

"Hmm."

I looked into the dark cave without going in. My Thousand-Mile Eyes repelled the darkness and widened my vision. Not long afterward, I discovered the switch monster. It was a ghost.

Just like in the original story, the Gari Mountain Dungeon was an undead dungeon. Monsters in this dungeon included dullahans, banshees, and other undead monsters which ranged from grade 9 to grade 3 of low-intermediate rank. The boss should be a death knight, so it was impossible for my current self to clear the Dungeon.

In the first place, not even Tomer had fully cleared this Dungeon. A death knight was a high-intermediate rank grade 1 monster. Defeating it was impossible without a high-rank Hero.

It seemed I would have to be content with just knowing where the Dungeon was. With my current strength, just beating the 'hidden stage' would be impossi...

"No."

I looked into my bag. The ginseng I just picked up was strutting its glorious and tantalizing appearance.

"..."

A hidden stage was a completely isolated space from the standard Dungeon, making it significantly easier to clear. In addition, this hidden stage's reward was better the quicker one took it. Above all, I didn't want to constantly worry about Tomer coming here quicker than in the original story.

Like I said before, the hidden stage's reward was a formless weapon called Aether. Because of its lack of a clear form, it was easy to misunderstand it as a lump of magic power, but the reason Aether was called a weapon was because of this property. Because it had no form, it could change its form to whatever its user wanted. Furthermore, Aether was an evolving weapon.

It was worth taking it early, even if I had to sacrifice the ginseng.

Of course, I didn't mean I would use the entire ginseng.
I took off three of the seven roots it had.

===

[7-year-old Ginseng Root]

—The root of a 7-year-old ginseng. Contains condensed magic power.

===

First, I tried changing the root's setting.

—For one hour, increases all variable stats by 4 points.

Since I was editing the effect it already had, I thought it wouldn't cost too much SP.

[You do not have enough SP.]

But I was wrong. It seemed raising stats required more restrictions than I thought.
Without any other choice, I modified the setting.

—For 30 minutes, increases all variable stats by 2 points.

[5 SP will be used. Would you like to save?]

This much was satisfactory.

I modified two ginseng roots with the above setting. By eating them both, my stats would increase by 4 points for 30 minutes. My variable stats, other than magic power, would then be on par with Yoo Yeonha's.

However, I gave the last ginseng root a different setting.

—Soaks into magic power and strengthens its power.

[5 SP will be used. Would you like to save?]

I hit [save].

With this, I should be able to clear the hidden stage.

I entered the cave with confidence. As soon as I stepped in, an extreme chill penetrated my body.

“Ugh.”

I moved my legs forward as I watched my own breath.

Ssssss.

Hearing a strange sound, I hid behind the cave’s wall. Within a distance I could see without using Thousand-Mile Eyes, a hologram-like ghost was wavering in the air.

That was the switch monster.

I could kill a monster of the level even without using a ginseng.

I took out my Desert Eagle. My Gift, Master Sharpshooter, had already reached grade 8. Piercing the vital point of such a slow monster was easier than doing push-ups.

I pulled the trigger.

The bullet cut through the air and struck the ghost. The bullet phased through the ghost without doing any damage, but the magic power contained inside the bullet didn’t. The magic power had hit the middle of its eyes perfectly.

Shortly, the ghost exploded into light without a sound.

At that moment, a strange wind blew from a direction, sucking in the ghost’s light.

That was where I had to go. The light led to the location of the hidden stage. There, an inferior version of a witch would be waiting for me.

My eyes didn’t miss the incredibly faint stream of light. I started following it.

After about 10 minutes of walking, I finally arrived at a place that was isolated from the Dungeon.

In the middle was a witch carrying Aether.

I took out my laptop from my bag.

Whiiiiish.

===

[Witch]

—Evandel the Witch. Possesses a spirit body and produces low rank ghosts.

===

Witch.

Countless number of monsters and devils appeared after Outcall, but the existences known as witches were rare. It was because it was difficult for a monster to be classified as a witch.

First, a witch had to have the ability to produce ghosts. Because of the high number of undead monsters a witch produced, a witch's home was called a 'stronghold'.

Second, a witch needed to have a human body. Without a human body, a witch couldn't use her magic power properly.

Finally, a witch needed to possess intelligence on par with humans, because a witch without intelligence couldn't distribute her ghosts efficiently.

The reason the witch in front of me was an inferior version was because she didn't fully meet the second and third requirements.

However, Evandel would one day become infamous.

Adult witches were difficult to deal with, so the most efficient way of subjugating one was to kill it when it was young, when its intelligence and body weren't fully developed.

But in the original story, Evandel was raised by Djinns, protected from stress and danger. After reaching adulthood and becoming independent, she established her stronghold in an abandoned school in Suwon.

This stronghold, which came to be known as Evandel's Castle, became the most fearsome stronghold in history.

The Hero Association famously said that it was "no different than a Tower."

By killing this inferior version of Evandel, I would obtain two things. One was Aether, and the other was Evandel's Seed. In the original story, Tomer only took Aether, giving Evandel's Seed to the followers of Isabel.

Since I planned on taking both, I needed to kill Evandel. There was only one problem...

"...She's a child."

Her appearance made me hesitate. She had a tiny face and was only 140 cm tall. With soft hands, she was squishing the soul of the ghost I just killed.

Tomer had killed that child, and I had to do the same in a single attack.

“Huu.”

But it had to be done. I was the one who created her anyways.

After resolving myself, I released Stigma’s magic power. A bullet would never be able to kill a witch in a spirit body. This was a matter of fact that wouldn’t change no matter how much SP I invested. Attempting to do so would only be a waste of SP.

‘Light attribute, spear.’

I breathed my will into Stigma’s magic power. The attribute I wanted was light, and the form I wanted was a spear.

The weapon I wanted was created using all of Stigma’s magic power, but its size and sharpness were horrible. In the first place, the amount of magic power in Stigma wasn’t enough to form even a single arrow properly. So, forming a perfect spear was being too greedy.

But I had a method of sharpening this spear. I placed a ginseng root on the spear. The spear devoured the ginseng, increasing its size and luster.

Next, I swallowed the two ginseng roots I modified before. Immediately, I could feel my body surging with vitality.

4 points... no, it was probably less since I took one on top of the other. Still, my body felt completely different than before. My muscles were brimming with strength, as though they were ready to explode at any moment. I felt hot, yet light, like I was no longer human, but rather a radioactive monster of some sort.

Breathing roughly, I looked down at my body. My body was bulked up and my five senses had become extremely sensitive.

As I thought, the spear was the best choice for displaying the most destructive power with amplified stats.

“...Huup!”

I hurled the spear with all my strength. The magic spear shot through the air like a flash of lightning without deviating from its intended path. The moment I let go, the spear had already pierced through Evandel’s head.

—...?

But Evandel survived. With the spear stuck in her head, Evandel turned towards me. I felt an unprecedented terror at the gory scene. A muddy stream coalesced on her hands. A vengeful spirit was taking shape.

“Um, wait, can we just talk this out?”

—Uuaaang...

However, in the next moment, Evandel collapsed with a strange cry. Life energy disappeared from her body, and a seed fell down to the ground.

“...Was it an instinctive reaction before death?”

After calming my beating heart, I walked up and picked up the seed.

Then, I walked forward into the darkness. A slime-like weapon with a blue glow, this was the weapon that made Tomer into one of the executives of Wicked.

Before I reached forward, I checked its description with my laptop.

===

[Aether]

[Mystic – Formless] [Evolving]

A corporeal but formless weapon. Adheres to its master or his weapon, reinforcing their strength.

—Master selection

*Will not adhere to another being once a master is chosen.

—Physical body reinforcement

*Increases the variable stats of its owner by 0.6 points.

—Weapon reinforcement

*Adheres to its master’s weapon and strengthens the weapon’s attack power. Aether itself can also form a weapon. (Current weapon-form Aether rank – ‘high rank’)

—Evolving weapon

All of the above functions evolves with its owner. Depending on the state of Aether’s awakening, other functions can develop.

===

I had obtained my weapon.

But I didn't expect things to end so easily.

Clack clack clack—

A series of striking sound rang out from all directions. Bones joining together formed the shape of a man, and I soon found myself surrounded by white-boned soldiers - skeletons.

Chapter 31

Same Bed, Different Dreams (1)

“Ah...”

A short groan left my mouth. My body ached everywhere. Skeleton bones were littered around me, and I was lying on the ground.

It was a difficult fight. I had no talent for close ranged combat, but I didn't want to waste precious bullets on skeletons, so I transformed Aether into a club to use as a melee weapon. Now that the ginseng's effect had worn off, I wondered why I did something so bold. It seemed it was true that a strong mind arose from a strong body.

“I would have died if they were black skeletons...”

Each time I swung the club, I destroyed three to four white skeletons. That was how strong my body was, but the fight had still taken 25 minutes. If the monster I fought weren't the low ranked white skeletons... I didn't even want to imagine the outcome.

“Agh.”

I raised my upper body and pondered as I scratched my back using a skeleton's bone. I managed to obtain Aether and Evandel's Seed. It was the biggest accomplishment I made since being transported into my novel.

To confirm my achievement, I opened my laptop.

[A fraction of the ginseng's effect melts into your body. Your strength and stamina increases by 0.02 points!]

[You obtained 47 SP.]

But what I gained from the system wasn't much. Was it because Aether wasn't a well-known weapon at this point? It wasn't much SP.

===

▷Variable Stats

[Strength 2.455]

[Stamina 2.545]
[Speed 2.85]
[Perception 3.705]
[Vitality 2.465]
[Magic power 1.925]

===

But the increase in variable stats was something to note. Thanks to Aether boosting each stat by 0.6 points, my stats looked much better. Now that my core stats were above 2, I was now on the level of a cadet, though I was still at the bottom of the barrel.

“...It’s time to go now.”

After appreciating the numbers for some time, I closed the laptop. It was time to go back. I wasn’t sure if I could walk properly, but if I stayed here any longer and was discovered by a monster, that would be the end of me.

I forced my creaking body up and began to walk back the way I came from.



At 10 P.M., I finally came back to the dorm, barely making it before curfew. I headed to the shower immediately after I opened the door and washed away the dirt covering my body. Because of the rough work-out I had, the warm water gave me a refreshing feeling.

“Phew.”

After turning off the shower head, I wiped myself off. I could see the 0.6 point stat increase on my body. Even without flexing or holding my breath, there was a clear six-pack on my stomach... Though, I guess it was the same for other cadets.

I stopped fooling around in front of the mirror and got out of the bathroom.

After putting on my underwear, I put my laptop and Evandel’s Seed on the desk.

“I brought it but...”

===

[Evandel’s Seed]

—Seed containing the soul of Evandel the witch.

===

When this seed germinates, 'Evandel' the Witch of Despair would be born. Her title made her sound evil, but if utilized correctly, she could become a valuable ally. The environment where one grew up was the most important thing in raising any living being. So, I just had to raise her well.

Feeding the seed was simple. Instead of water, I just had to give it small amounts of blood. A witch's personality and growth were dependent on who the blood came from. Chae Nayun's or Kim Suho's blood would be the best, but acquiring them wasn't easy.

"I'll just hold onto you for now."

I wrapped Evandel's Seed in a handkerchief and put it in a drawer. Chae Nayun and Kim Suho were model citizens who regularly donated blood. Perhaps, I could pull some tricks to acquire their blood packs.

Next, I accessed Chae Nayun's smartwatch to prepare for tomorrow's event. Coincidentally, she was currently talking with Sven.

===

Sven: [You're coming to the club tomorrow, right?]

[Yeah, when are we meeting?]

Sven: [Come to the Portal at 4.]

[Why so early?]

Sven: [The meeting place is in Gangwondo, so let's bet on who will get more kills before the seniors arrive.]

[Sure, that sounds nice.]

===

From the looks of it, they seemed to have gotten fairly close. The meeting time was 5 P.M. according to the club announcement, but Sven had asked to meet an hour early.

4 P.M.

After noting the time in my head, I accessed Violet Banquet to sell the ginseng I picked up. Packhorse Master's stock price was going up. I had wanted to buy more before it was too late.

[Violet Banquet Online Auction House]

[Item for Sale]

[Description – 7-year-old ginseng dug from Gangwondo’s mountain.]

[Please place the item on the Portal for appraisal.]

A circular hologram projected out of the laptop screen. Once I placed the ginseng on it, it would be transported to Violet Banquet’s appraisal center, and the item would go on auction once the appraisal was complete.

I couldn’t explain how this technology worked. A Portal was created from magic engineering, but I had no clue how it could be projected remotely. Modern technology wasn’t advanced enough to achieve such a feat.

But Violet Banquet could do it.

The reason was simple. Violet Banquet itself was the reward of ‘Tower of Information’. Just like the textbook said, Towers gave rewards that were beyond anyone’s imagination.

[The item has been transported. The appraisal result will come out within the next 24 hours.]

After seeing the ginseng disappear into the Portal, I closed the laptop.



Thursday, 3:30 P.M.

I got dressed before it was too late. Thanks to the modified fatigue recovery potion, I was at my peak condition. Now, I just had to “coincidentally” join up with Sven and Chae Nayun, and prevent them from being together. I wanted to chase Sven out if possible, but that was beyond my ability.

I left the dorm and arrived at the bus station. A bus arrived not long after, but I passed it by. I had to wait for someone. Thankfully, she was noticeable from a mile away. Just like now, her face radiated light wherever she went.

“What are you doing here?”

Chae Nayun at least acknowledged my existence. I tilted my head nonchalantly.

Sven should already be waiting at the Portal Station, but I knew Chae Nayun would be late. That was just how her personality was, and I had also peeked at the message she sent Sven.

“Why didn’t you get on the bus?”

Chae Nayun asked. For a moment, I flinched. So she was watching me waiting for the bus. Come to think of it, Chae Nayun had good eyes as well.

“I was hesitating. I came out too early, so there was too much time left over until the club meeting. I just decided to go through, since I don’t have anything better to do.”

“Oh? What club are you in?”

“Hunting.”

“Hunting? I’m in hunting too, and I don’t remember seeing you...”

The bus arrived while Chae Nayun was talking. I hopped in, and Chae Nayun followed.

“I didn’t go to the orientation. That’s probably why.”

I spoke as I sat down on a seat.

“...I see.”

Chae Nayun sat down across from me. Then, she glanced at me with doubtful eyes before opening her mouth.

“Just how many clubs are you in? I heard from Yeonha that you were in her club.”

“Three.”

“Wow, what a waste of time.”

“You’re in two too.”

“I’m... So what?”

I forced myself to smile before closing my eyes. I didn't want to continue this conversation any longer. Chae Nayun didn't seem to mind ending the conversation either.

Without talking for the rest of the bus ride, Chae Nayun and I arrived at the Portal Station. I could see Sven in the distance. He ran towards the bus as soon as he saw it, but he paused momentarily when he saw me. But soon, he walked up with a smile.

"You came earlier than I expected."

"Mhm. Oh right, Sven, you know him, right? He's the one who helped us before. Kim Hajin."

"Yeah, I know. Hey."

Sven reached his hand out and I grabbed it. Sven tried to let go immediately, but I didn't let him. I grasped his hand firmly and stared into his eyes. Black, lifeless eyes. My Gift of observation peered into his pupils. I could catch a glimpse of Asmodeus' evil energy.

"Hey, what are you doing?"

Chae Nayun stepped in and separated me from Sven. No, she separated Sven from me.

"Why are you picking a fight?"

She snapped at me sharply. I turned around without saying anything and walked to the Portal Station's entrance.

I wasn't particularly skilled in distinguishing the state of Djinns. But Sven was undoubtedly on a dangerous edge. I could tell simply by looking at my laptop.

[In the original story, he dies after going berserk without accomplishing anything.]
[Modified setting – Increased self-control and mental power to help him better control Asmodeus' power.]



We arrived at a residential area in Gangwondo.

As Gangwondo had high mana density, there were many monsters and wild animals. As such, the hunting club, Leonidas, obtained the cooperation of the local government

and residents to hunt in this area. By hunting wild animals that frequently invaded the residential area, the cadets would be helping citizens while enjoying their hobbies.

“You met on the way here?”

At the club’s meeting place, Sven asked Chae Nayun.

“Yeah.”

Chae Nayun narrowed her eyes and observed Kim Hajin’s movements. He was sitting on a rock and looking at his watch.

He kept doing this. While pretending to be oblivious to his surroundings, he kept loitering around them.

“Doesn’t it look like he’s following us?”

“Yeah.”

“..”

Sven stared at Kim Hajin for a while before continuing.

“Be careful.”

“About what?”

“You heard about cadets going missing lately, right?”

“He wouldn’t do something like that.”

“But...”

“He has an alibi.”

During the estimated time of the third victim, there was a record of Kim Hajin using a Portal. So Chae Nayun had recommended Kim Hajin to the Djinn investigation team. After all, Yoo Yeonha, who was known for her objective judgment, praised his eyesight.

“Really?”

“Hm...”

Chae Nayun fell in thought as she rubbed her chin.

Though he wasn't a suspect in the case, there was indeed something strange about him. Even today, Kim Hajin clearly skipped a bus to take the next one with me.

“...It's not that he likes me, I think.”

But thinking about it now, it wasn't completely absurd.

If bringing up my older brother was to draw my attention, it all made sense. Not to mention, the unusually aggressive stance he took against Sven today... Oh, and even before then, at the National Weapons Museum, his partner should have been Yoo Yeonha, but he was at the museum for some reason.

Of course, it was only a suspicion for now. But if that was really his intention, he was going at it the wrong way. Trying to draw someone's attention by harassing them was disgusting and shameless, and following someone around secretly was no different than stalking.

“...Nah, no way.”

Chae Nayun shook her head and got rid of the suspicions in her head.

It didn't make sense. She couldn't even remember if they had met before the museum incident.

Of course, she knew there were lots of guys who had a crush on her. Not just many, but a truckload... But still...

“Look, the others are here.”

At that moment, Sven pointed ahead. Chae Nayun became startled and looked up. The hunting club's leader and other first and second years were walking over.

†

[546,000,000]

12 hours after the start of the auction, my ginseng was sold. 546 million won. Even after the 11% auction fee, it was close to 500 million won. That was with four missing roots too (I snapped another one off in case of an emergency). Now if I threw all this into stocks...

“Now, come closer everyone!”

A cheerful voice rang out. I turned towards the direction of the voice. The club leader and other members had arrived.

Today’s event would finally start.

But to be honest, I didn’t know much about today’s event. I only roughly wrote the conclusion.

[Chae Nayun was gravely injured by a berserk Djinn, and Sven dissipated into dust.]

That was it. The whole point of this event was to get Kim Suho to think about Chae Nayun.

Because of today’s event, Kim Suho would mistake Chae Nayun to be the Djinn’s target, and while everyone was paying attention to Chae Nayun, Yoo Yeonha would be kidnapped. It was something like that.

But the biggest problem was that Sven had changed from the original story. He became calmer and more elaborate. Since he could use Asmodeus’ power better, Chae Nayun might suffer a more disgraceful situation.

“It’s nice to see everyone again. Again, our hunting club helps citizens by hunting wild animals, the so-called killing two birds with one stone.”

The talkative club leader began his speech.

“Oh, by the way, who might you be? I don’t recall seeing you in the orientation.”

But suddenly, he stopped his speech and asked me.

“I’m Kim Hajin. I couldn’t attend the orientation due to a personal matter.”

“Ah, that’s fine. We didn’t do much on the orientation. For today...”

I looked for Chae Nayun while ignoring the club leader. I found her almost instantly, but I jumped mildly in surprise.

Chae Nayun was also staring at me. Fixedly, with a suspicious look.

Chapter 32

Same Bed, Different Dreams (2)

I climbed a mountain, and from the numerous trees on its peak, I chose the tallest red pine to climb. From the treetop, I looked around. I could see everything within the horizon. Neither the densely packed pine trees nor the countless number of leaves could impede the Thousand-Mile Eyes.

Everything was within my sight – a young nameless cadet chasing after a wild boar, a second-year couple who were making out instead of hunting, Chae Nayun who was skillfully shooting her arrows, and Sven who was throwing pebbles by a creek.

Chae Nayun and Sven separated for their bet on who would hunt more wild animals. As such, Chae Nayun was focused on hunting, but Sven wasn't. He was staring fixedly at the creek. It clearly wasn't to hunt a wild animal.

But then, something strange happened. From the opposite side of the creek, a wild animal appeared. It was a leopard cat, one of the most common animals. Sven did not even glimpse at it, but a tentacle shot out of his back, flying towards the leopard cat like a spear and piercing its neck. The leopard cat was then dragged towards Sven on a skewer.

Clearly, it was Asmodeus' power.

His hunting continued in this way for an hour. Chae Nayun searched for wild animals herself, while Sven killed any wild animal that came within a 300-meter range of him without moving a finger.

Then, seemingly because their promised time was over, the two of them joined up at the creek.

—A total of six. Three wild boars, one leopard cat, and two rabbits.

Chae Nayun spoke proudly.

—As you can see, I killed eight.

Sven smiled as he pointed at the wild animals piled up next to him. Immediately, Chae Nayun jaws dropped.

—Really?

Chae Nayun approached the pile of corpses and confirmed Sven's words.

—Wow, you weren't kidding. How did you find eight?

Chae Nayun sat down next to Sven as she ruffled her hair.

—You brought them from somewhere, didn't you? How much did you pay?

She joked as she poked Sven's arm.

From my perspective, it did look like Chae Nayun was leading him on. In reality, she was probably doing it thoughtlessly.

—So now you have to grant me a wish, right?

—... Tsk, yeah. What do you want?

They had bet on a wish.

I was beginning to understand why Sven lost control.

—Um...

—Yeah?

—...

Sven looked straight into Chae Nayun's eyes. Then, he shook his head with a grin.

—No, it's nothing.

—What is it? Tell me.

I took out my gun from Stigma's extradimensional space. I was about a kilometer away, but I could snipe from here without a problem.

Wheesh. Aether adhered to the gun and increased its performance.

—You see...

Why Sven went berserk made sense if he confessed and was rejected. Sven had fallen in love at first sight when he saw Chae Nayun at the beginning of the school year. In addition, Asmodeus, the devil Sven was contracted to, was the Devil of Lust. Endurance hardly existed in a Djinn with amplified emotions and obsession.

—I like you.

—... Huh?

Chae Nayun frowned at the sudden confession.

—What are you saying so suddenly?

—... You don't like me?

—Of course I don't. It's been, what, two days since we first talked to each other? You expect me to fall in love with you in two days? Well, maybe you did, but I didn't.

Chae Nayun got up coldly. Sven drooped his head. He was only rejected, but his body was already beginning to transform. Black magic power was rising from parts of his body.

I aimed my gun at his head.

—Plus, I like men who are stronger than me.

—... Than you?

—Yeah, and you're much weaker than me, so I can't see you as a man.

With that, the switch was triggered. Sven's eyes turned blood red.

Though he managed to endure it until now, Sven was only an extra. And this was an extra's limit.

—... Really?

Sven got up. Chae Nayun spoke without turning around to look.

—Yeah. So don't contact me from now. I'm sorry, but I think cutting off our relationship cleanly will be better than staying friends and giving you false hope.

Sven leaned towards Chae Nayun. At the same time, I fired. The target point was Sven's head. But the actual location of impact was his shoulder. It was because of the distance between us and the fact that Sven moved.

Sven must have planned to jump on Chae Nayun, but because of my bullet, he lost his balance and ended up headbutting her instead.

—Uk!

Chae Nayun flew forward after being struck by Sven. However, she landed without shock with an agile forward roll. She quickly turned around. Immediately, she saw Sven whose body had half transformed into a Djinn.

—You, you!

—...

Sven glared at Chae Nayun and sent his tentacles after her.

I fired consecutively. One, two, three, four... I emptied the magazine. Even while she was bewildered at the mysterious support, Chae Nayun did what she needed to do.

She quickly jumped back to gain distance before firing her bow. An arrow penetrated Sven's shoulder. But even with an arrow sticking out of him, Sven ran towards Chae Nayun and grabbed her head.

—But I'm...

He then slammed her on the ground while shouting loudly.

—... stronger than you!

Boom!

Sven sat on Chae Nayun in a mount position. Chae Nayun struggled and gathered magic power in her hand. In the blink of an eye, the magic power condensed into the shape of a dagger. However, Sven grabbed her wrist before she could make her move.

“...Tsk.”

I couldn't help her from this distance. Sven's body was covered with reinforced magic power. Ordinary bullets couldn't penetrate this barrier, but using a light bullet was also impossible. Because Chae Nayun was right under him, she would be swept in as well.

With no other choice, I jumped from tree to tree. At the same time, I changed the Desert Eagle into its shotgun form. I had to get close and blow up his head, which had weaker magic power reinforcement due to his incomplete Djinn transformation.

The 1km distance was shortened in a moment.

Landing smoothly on the ground, I approached Sven and Chae Nayun.

“Uup, uup!”

Sven had kept Chae Nayun alive. As I said before, Asmodeus was the Devil of Lust. It was clear what Asmodeus' contracted Djinn would want to do.

Seeing Sven licking Chae Nayun's face, I frowned in disgust and put the gun barrel next to his head. The coldness of the steel made Sven shudder. His eyeballs rolled towards me.

I pulled the trigger immediately. The shotgun shell tore through Sven's head and messed up its inside. Sven flew away, screaming.

“Kek, kek.”

“Thankfully, you're alive.”

I looked down at Chae Nayun. Her face was wet with saliva and there were wounds on her body, but she was alive.

Trying to fool around and dying in vain, this was precisely the special trait of Djinn of Lust.

“Stand...”

When I reached my hand out to Chae Nayun, a tentacle came flying at me. Aether instantly formed a shield and protected me from the first strike. But Sven flew towards me using his tentacle. He lightly struck Aether's shield away and grabbed my neck.

"Uuuk!"

It was an indescribable pain. As I was getting choked, I was deprived of oxygen. I couldn't breathe, and I couldn't talk. All I could do was struggle...

...My vision began to turn cloudy. I couldn't feel my limbs. My body felt numb, but I didn't see anything like my life flashing before my eyes.

My thoughts cut off and my pulse began to slow.

I closed my eyes. I was unfamiliar with the sensation of death.

—Let go, you bastard!

Like a bolt of lightning, someone's shout woke my consciousness from falling asleep. Chae Nayun was flying up behind Sven's back.

She swung an incredibly long longsword. From Sven's shoulder to his waist, the sword cleanly severed him in half.

"...Puhak."

Sven collapsed in two halves, and I gasped for air on the ground.

This was the first time I felt so thankful to have oxygen.

Haa... haa... haa...

After three big pants, I leaned against a tree trunk.

"Huu... Wow, what was that, a lightsaber?"

Then, I spoke nonchalantly while pointing at the longsword in Chae Nayun's hands. Chae Nayun had formed a sword purely with magic power. The sword blade surged with magic power, while the handle was calm without movement. I knew just how difficult it was to achieve this perfect harmony. Even Kim Suho wouldn't be able to do it. It was only possible for Chae Nayun, as this was a part of her true Gift.

"...I don't know."

The magic power sword in her hands disappeared. Chae Nayun and I stared at each other silently.

The more I looked at her, the more I realized what poor state she was in. She was bleeding profusely from her wounds, and her clothes were ripped to shreds, revealing her underwear. I took off my coat and pushed it to her. But Chae Nayun only stared at it.

“Take it.”

“...Are you okay?”

She asked a strange question instead of taking the coat like I said.

“Yeah.”

“I’m glad.”

“...What about you? Are you okay?”

“I’m fine.”

Thud.

Chae Nayun collapsed as soon as she said that.

“...”

It was only obvious with how much magic power she used.

I flipped her over so that she was facing the sky and put my coat over her. Then, I stared at the spot Sven was.

Without a sound, without leaving behind a single trace of his existence, Sven dissipated into thin air. This was the death of a Djinn. As humans contracted devils using their souls as the price, they belonged to their contracted devil even in death.

Chwaaa—

The trees cried somberly.

Tomorrow, Germany would receive a tragic news.



Sssss—

Chae Nayun opened her eyes at the sound of ruffling leaves and the wind's chilling breeze. The sky was completely dark. But before she could question where she was, an intense pain swept her head like a tsunami. Chae Nayun clutched her head. A pain similar to glass shards tearing up her head disappeared after tormenting her for a long time.

“...Haa.”

Once the pain died down, Chae Nayun collected her breath while still lying down on the ground.

Only then did she remember what happened.

“Was it a dream?”

Everything she experienced felt so distant, and she naturally wondered if it was all a dream. But the wounds on her body and the coat covering her told her it was all real.

“...Oh, right.”

Chae Nayun raised her upper body.

But at that moment, she discovered the silhouette of a man and shouted in surprise.

“Ah! Oh god, you scared me!”

“You're up.”

It was Kim Hajin. Leaned against a tree, he was staring at his smartwatch. It was Kim Hajin again. Every time something happened, he was always there.

...Though, it was also thanks to him that she escaped from death three times.

“What time is it?”

“10 at night.”

“What? It's curfew soon.”

Chae Nayun tried to get up quickly. But she couldn't feel her legs. Wondering what was going on, she tried to move them again. Still, neither moved. No matter how many times she tried, they didn't budge.

An indescribable terror swept over her, making her heart beat loudly.

"W-What, m-m-my legs, what's w-wrong with m-my..."

"Magic power exhaustion. Is it your first time?"

"...Huh? Magic power exhaustion?"

Magic power exhaustion. Chae Nayun had heard about it. The dictionary definition was 'a state in which a person was completely drained of magic power.'

Once a person completely used up his magic power, his magic power recovery rate would be lowered drastically, and he would be bedridden for at least two days.

"Yep."

After a short retort, Kim Hajin approached Chae Nayun. Then, he kneeled down with his back pointing towards her.

This incomprehensible action made Chae Nayun furrow her brows.

"What?"

"Get on. You can't walk."

"Do I look crazy?"

"...Then what, you want to stay here forever?"

Kim Hajin's look of pity was nothing short of humiliation.

But she didn't have any other choice. She would be troubled without his help.

Chae Nayun wrapped her arms around his neck and pulled herself up.

"I'm going."

"...Yeah."

Kim Hajin slowly began to descend the mountain.

Watching the distant scenery, Chae Nayun fell in thought, 'Sven was a Djinn. Then was he the culprit behind the cadets' disappearances? Djinnns were people who were once humans, so since when was Sven a Djinn? And where did Kim Hajin pop out from? Don't tell me, was he constantly following me around?'

'This guy... Does he really like me?'

Chae Nayun needed more time to process everything that happened today.



PDF by: traitorAZEN